

## ARTICLE II.

PRESBYTERIAN ORDINATION NOT A CHARM BUT  
AN ACT OF GOVERNMENT.

[Having republished in our April Number one of two arguments delivered by Dr. Robert J. Breckenridge in 1843, we fulfil the promise then made to spread the other one before our readers at this time.]

## ARGUMENT SECOND.

No one, Moderator, can regret more than I do the necessity of arguing a question like the one I have now submitted to this Synod, under the extraordinary and difficult circumstances which surround me. Nothing but the deepest convictions of duty could induce me to press upon the attention of this body a subject in regard to which it is painfully evident so many of its members are resolved to hear nothing, while so many more listen under the blinding influence of a foregone conclusion. Nothing but the impression that necessity is laid upon me could sustain me under the **the** interruptions and vexations, altogether without precedent in this Synod, which have consumed nearly one entire session, and so large a portion of another, in a struggle on the part of many leading ministers to prevent me from being heard at all, or even having liberty to put this great subject in a position which will insure the review of the court above. And you can easily imagine, sir, that at this late hour of the night, with a body worn down, a mind harassed, and a heart full of sadness, I am but illy qualified to acquit myself in a manner becoming either the subject or the occasion.<sup>1</sup> I am no novice, sir, in scenes

---

<sup>1</sup>The reader is referred to the printed Minutes of the Synod for an official record of the facts and to the Spirit of the XIX. Century, Vol. II., pp. 611—20 Nov., 1843, for a rapid description of the scenes alluded to. It is proper to say, once for all, that this report only pretends to give the *substance* of what was said by me in Synod. This I have endeavored to do as accurately as my memory would serve me.

VOL. XXXIII., NO. 3.—4.

of profound agitation, but I must say I have never witnessed one which seemed to me more needless, whether reference be had to the subject which has produced it, or the object towards which it has been directed. It is not in this manner that practical questions of great importance, which it is manifest the most of us have not examined, can be settled in a Church renowned for the thoroughness with which it examines everything, and the care with which all its fixed opinions are made up. It is not by such methods that its confidence can be weaned from those who are known to it only by their advocacy of its precious faith and scriptural order—an advocacy which never stopped to count the cost, nor waited to be enlightened by the law of majorities. Nor is it in this way that ministers can most clearly establish their exclusive title to the exercise of powers, which, they seem to think, are much too sacred to be shared with our ruling elders. Sir, I have seen and heard, both in public and in private, strange things since this body met. And while I deeply regret to be obliged to say what has now fallen from me, I should feel constrained to add much more, if I were not convinced that gentlemen will, upon reflection, see reason to regret a good deal that has been said and done; and especially, if I were not sure that they will hardly think of executing, in any event, either their threats of secession from the Church, or their intimations of arresting, by the discipline of the Church, inquiries and discussions whose whole object it is to vindicate the established order of that very Church, and to place it on the immovable basis of divine right.

I think, sir, the majority of this body has been misled in several incidental decisions rendered by it during the long struggle to suppress this subject; and that I have reason to complain of the effects of those errors as regards myself. But I should be unjust to my own feelings, and to the Synod, if I did not express my admiration of that spirit by which, mastering itself, it has at length put an end to those disorders which seemed designed to prevent a decision of this question, and has resumed the usual tenor of its business. It is equally foreign from my nature to trespass needlessly upon indulgence as to be violently turned aside from my convictions. Respecting, as far as my duty will

permit, what I cannot doubt are the wishes of this court, I will omit many things which I desired to offer to its consideration, and will observe, in what I cannot properly pass by, as much brevity as is consistent with any tolerable clearness of statement.

The most of those great truths which must, as it appears to me, control the decision of the present question, are held with a common consent in the Presbyterian Church and in most other Reformed Churches. God has always had a Church in this world; and when he first instituted outward ordinances for it, he did not then for the first time have a seed to serve him, but he then placed a visible and permanent mark of separation between them and a guilty world. When he added a written revelation and set up an abiding priesthood, these were new gifts bestowed upon his Church, and not the first calling of an elect people; and the whole Jewish economy was but a means whereby the covenant of grace was held forth and administered. To this Church of God, catholic and visible; the Lord Jesus ascending up on high, has given "*the ministry*," (Conf. Faith, Ch. xxv., Sec. 3,) that is, ordinary and extraordinary officers; and in our Church those officers held to be ordinary and perpetual, . . . in the Church, are bishops or pastors; the representatives of the people, usually styled ruling elders; and deacons," (Form of Gov., Ch. iii, Sec. 2.)<sup>1</sup> Of these we all admit that the first class only have it in charge to preach the gospel of Christ and to administer the sacraments; that the two first classes only have any charge in the rule of the Church, and by consequence in the composition of those assemblies in which the power to rule is lodged; and that officers of the third class are neither public teachers nor church rulers.<sup>2</sup> The lawful vocation of these officers, and especially of ministers of the word, is not a subject of dispute amongst us; but it is commonly held that to be real it must be divine, and that the subject of it ought to have as the foundation of his purpose to preach the everlasting gospel an inward call and fitness imparted by the Holy Ghost. To make his outward vocation complete, he is presumed to be called to the

---

<sup>1</sup>See also Ephesians iv. 11-13; 1 Cor. xii. 28-30; Heb. v. 4.

<sup>2</sup>See Form of Government, Chaps. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 10, &c.

spiritual charge of some particular church, by the members of that church,<sup>1</sup> and then the Presbytery under whose charge he is, being satisfied upon these grounds, and also upon its own independent judgment carefully exercised in each particular case, sets the candidate apart *by ordination* to the work unto which he and they and the people of God concur in believing the Lord has called him.

Our Church has always held, in accordance with the opinion of the Reformed Churches in general, that the office of evangelist is an extraordinary one, but contrary to the judgment of the European Churches, it has held that it is an office not extinct, and provision is made in our system for the ordination of evangelists in particular circumstances.<sup>2</sup> I concur fully in the truth of both these positions; but at the same time I am bound to say that in my opinion the practice which has long prevailed with regard to ordinations *sine titulo*, and which has grown to such an evil as to demand a vigorous intervention by the General Assembly to correct it,<sup>3</sup> is eminently calculated to introduce into the gospel ministry persons neither called nor qualified for it, and who under the pretext of being evangelists, are too often open deserters of their covenanted calling. Nor can it be denied that by this means the proper influence of the people of God, in determining by their call, or in refusing to call, is rendered to a great degree nugatory in regard to ministerial ordination; and that a large body of nominal ministers, ordained without ever having received a call from any particular church, and employed chiefly in avocations which have little relation to the ministry of the word, are exerting, through many of our most important Presbyteries, an immense authority over the whole Church, while they have no right to exert a particle of authority in any church in particular. This is the more extraordinary when we reflect that such results are not only contrary to the whole scope of our system, but to express provisions of the

---

<sup>1</sup>See Form of Government, Ch. xv., *passim*.

<sup>2</sup>See Form of Government, Ch. xv., Sec. 15.

<sup>3</sup>See Assembly's printed Minutes for 1841, p. 447 (Committee on Overtures, No. 11), and Minutes for 1842, pages 28, 29.

standards of those foreign Churches to whose law and practice appeal is continually made, when infractions of our standards are to be justified or explained away.<sup>1</sup> Sir, it is worthy of more than a passing thought, that such furious opposition should be made against the claims of that class of presbyters called ruling elders, whose vocation is unquestioned and their employment in their proper duties undisputed; while at the same moment another class of presbyters, called ministers *sine titulo*, of whom so considerable a proportion may be seriously questioned as to the regularity of their vocation, and still more gravely called to account in regard to the nature of their employments, are permitted, without question, to exercise the highest and most delicate prerogatives of the pastors and rulers of the Church.

The main point of this discussion, so far as the question is one of positive law, is one, in regard to which it would seem to be impossible there could be a difference of opinion amongst us. Where is the power of ordaining ministers of the word lodged under our Constitution?" The *Presbytery* has power . . . . *to ordain, install, remove, and judge ministers.*" (Form of Gov., Ch. x., Sec. 8.) What Presbytery? Why, sir, beyond all doubt that Presbytery which is one of the divinely instituted assemblies declared in this same Constitution to be invested with power to govern the Church of Christ (Ch. viii., Sec. 1); that Presbytery defined in the same Chapter which declares its power to ordain, as being composed of many separate congregations, which, by their need of mutual counsel, invest presbyterial assemblies with their importance and usefulness, and declared to consist of *ministers and ruling elders* (Ch. x., Sec. 1 and 2); that Presbytery, thus constituted, which is so often and so prominently held forth throughout the entire Chapter which treats expressly of the ordination of pastors and evangelists (Ch. xv.); that Presbytery, to which, as constituted of the officers called of God to receive the fearful trust of the keys of the kingdom of heaven, the

---

<sup>1</sup>For the doctrine of the First Book of Discipline of the Scottish Church. see Duncan's Collections, p. 54-55; for that of the Second Book of Discipline, *Idem*, p. 71-2; for that of the Westminster Assembly and the Kirk of Scotland after 1645, *Idem*, p. 175-9.

power of Church censures is committed. (Confession of Faith, Ch. xxx., Sec. 1 and 2.) This, sir, is the body to which, by language as plain as language can be, the power to ordain ministers is confided under this Constitution. This power is confided to it *as a body*—not to its individual members; to it, as *the* body defined in the instrument itself; and to place the power in any other hands than those of an assembly composed of the pastors and ruling elders of the churches of a particular district, is to act in gross disregard of law which we have solemnly declared we believe to be in full accordance with the revealed will of God, and which we have sacredly bound ourselves by mutual covenants to observe. It is nothing to the present argument whether other ordinations be valid or invalid, though I readily admit them to be for substance good, even when they are irregular in form. It is nothing worth to enter into the questions so largely disputed in the Westminster Assembly about congregations fixed and **congregations** fluid—about a church state settled, and a church state unsettled; about the exclusive power of Presbytery and the concurrent power of Presbytery and consistory or church session in the premises. It is wholly beside the question, as matter of strict argument, what our own Church even believed or did before the formation of the present Form of Church Government, and its adoption in 1788; as much so as it would be to determine the powers of the present Congress of the United States by the practice or the theory of the government under the old Confederation, instead of doing it by a fair construction of the present Constitution. The true question is, What is the law of this Church as laid down in this book? And the answer is simple, clear, explicit—that the ordination of ministers of the word belongs, under our covenanted system, neither to pastors nor committees, nor nondescript things called quorums, nor church sessions, nor Synods, but to *Presbyteries*; and not to Presbyteries in the vague and general sense of the term, but to the Presbyteries of this Constitution. Nor can I conceive, sir, that a candid mind can doubt in regard to this point, after it has been plainly stated.

The *formal* parts of this ordination are stated with absolute

precision. A fast day ought to be observed in the congregation where the ordination is to take place previous to it. (Form of Gov., Ch. xv., Sec. 11.) The *Presbytery* being convened, a member ought to preach a sermon; the same, or some other member, should explain, enforce, and recapitulate the case; the person appointed to preside should ask the questions set down to be answered both by the candidate and the people (*Idem.*, Sec. 12 and 13). “Then the presiding minister shall by prayer, *and with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery*, according to the apostolic example, *solemnly ordain him* to the holy office of the Gospel ministry.” (*Idem.*, Sec. 14.) Who shall ordain him? “*The presiding minister*,” in the name, by the authority, with the concurrence, in the bosom of the constituted Presbytery—as its Moderator—and not otherwise; so are the words written. Whose hands are to be laid on him that is ordained? “*The hands of the Presbytery*,” so again are the written words. What Presbytery? Why, beyond all the powers of human ingenuity and perversity to gainsay, the Presbytery of this Constitution; the Presbytery of this Chapter; the Presbytery that licensed the candidate; the Presbytery that received his call and **and** put it into his hands; the Presbytery that examined him and appointed a day to ordain him, and met for that purpose in the church that called him; the Presbytery that chose one of its ministers to preach, another to deliver a charge to the people, another to deliver a charge to the new minister, another to preside at his ordination. This is the Presbytery that lays its hands on him; and to assert the contrary—I say it without intending to give offence—is utter folly. But this Presbytery is a Presbytery which consists of ministers and elders—a Presbytery in which one elder from every congregation in the district has a right to sit as a member. Therefore, by the irresistible force of the very terms of the law, every elder present, and a member of the body, is as much bound to lay on his hands as any member present can be. Why, sir, would you stultify our fathers? Did they first define with the utmost clearness the term *Presbytery*; then invest the body so called with the power of ordaining ministers of the word; then, in a long chapter treating of this ordination in detail

use the word a dozen times in its defined sense; and then without notice or motive use the same word in the same chapter and touching the same business, in a sense not only inconsistent with their own definition of it, and their constant use of it, but in a sense flatly contrary to both? The thing is supremely absurd. We have in this city a municipal government which consists of a Mayor and two bodies called jointly the City Council. Suppose the Legislature of this State were to pass an Act of fourteen or fifteen sections, defining the power belonging to the municipal government over any particular subject, and directing minutely the manner of its exercise; suppose it should say in one section it meant by the words "municipal government" the Mayor and the two branches of the City Council, and then throughout the Act use the words confessedly in this sense, until it came to the fourteenth section, and in it should use the same words, in regard to the same matter, once more; now, sir, I demand of you, what would be thought of a man who could seriously contend that in this case the words "municipal government," used in the fourteenth section of the Act, really did not mean the Mayor and both branches of the City Council, but in fact meant only and singly the first branch? Will you say, no man would venture upon so marvellous a folly? Then why, sir, shall we have a thing just as preposterous forced upon the Church, in the name of reason, of our Constitution, and of the word of God?

A good deal has been said and written to prove that the views held by me are essentially Congregational, and that the ordination contended for by me is Congregational ordination. Various bodies, calling themselves Congregationalists or Independents, have adopted a threefold method of ordination. Some have contended that the brotherhood in each congregation must ordain; which is strict Independency. But, sir, have I not put forth all my strength, here and elsewhere, to prove that ordination appertains to government, and that church government is *jure divino* in assemblies of Presbyters, both teaching and ruling? Others have contended, as did most of the early English Independents, that ordination is in the hands of the teaching and ruling officers of



each particular congregation. But, sir, have I not always, and earnestly, testified that the ruling assemblies, and, of course, the ordaining **assemblies** of the Church, are classical and synodical, as well as congregational, and that ordination regularly belongs to the classical—that is, Presbyterial assemblies? The Congregationalists of America, in their early platforms, directed that in “calling and choosing a pastor,” the particular church should “consult and advise with the pastors of the neighboring congregations;” and that in ordaining him and setting him apart to his office, “ ’tis ordinarily requisite that the pastors of neighboring congregations concur with the preaching elder or elders, if such there be.”<sup>1</sup> That is, they held ordination to the ministry to be in the hands of ministers only; which is precisely the doctrine against which I am contending—precisely the doctrine of those who denounce me as a Brownist! [Here the Rev. Dr. Culyer interposed, and said that the practice of the New England churches at present is to ordain by councils, composed both of ministers and lay messengers from the particular churches, and that in the act of ordination the ministers alone imposed hands.] Moderator, I have carefully examined this subject, as it is contained in formal and public acts, and I do not see how I can have been misled in regard to it. But the testimony of my excellent friend being to matter of fact, of which he says he has personal knowledge, of course I take it as unquestionable; and I beg him and this Synod to observe how my argument is strengthened by the information he has given us. Why, sir, Congregational ordination, as now explained, is precisely the ordination which the construction of the Assembly of 1843 established, as taught in our standards: ordination by an assembly of ministers and others, in which all but the ministers stand aside when hands are imposed, and they alone perform this act. Indeed, ours is the more unwarrantable of the two; for our ordaining assembly, thus broken into fragments, is a real church court, while the New England council is but a special and occasional assembly; our ruling elders are

---

<sup>1</sup>See Heads of Agreement, and Articles of Church Discipline, agreed on at Saybrook, September 9, 1708, Ch. ii., Sec. 4 and 5, p. 109; Edition of 1810 of Saybrook Platform.

VOL. XXXIII., NO. 3—5.

scriptural presbyters-ordained officers, set apart to compose such assemblies—while the Congregational lay messengers do not pretend to be presbyters, and may be only private members of the churches. No, sir; the principles for which I contend are strictly Presbyterian principles; the ordination they establish is a purely Presbyterian ordination; nor am I able to comprehend how these principles and this ordination can be rejected, without falling off on the one side to the final grounds of Prelacy, or, on the other, to those of Independency.

It cannot escape notice, that, if ruling elders are denied the right of imposing hands in the ordination of pastors and evangelists, it must necessarily follow that they ought to be prevented from taking any part in every other portion of these ordinations. The ground upon which they act in the matter at all, under this Constitution, is, that they are declared to be a component part of of the Presbytery (Form of Government, Chap. x., Sec. 2); that the Presbytery is declared to have power to ordain ministers (*Idem*, Sec 8); and that “the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery” is declared to be a formal part of this ordination (*Idem*, Chap. xv., Sec. 14); and it is a ground altogether impregnable. If the laying on of hands be the only essential part of ordination, or the main part of it, then the more clearly this is proved, the more important is it that ruling elders be not illegally ousted of their rights, and the more manifest is it that this right is inherent in their office—since, if this is ordination, this is the very thing they are commanded to do. But, on the other hand, if the imposition of hands is any part at all of ordination, then, manifestly, the body which has the entire power of ordination has power to perform this part of ordination; and, therefore, ruling elders have it upon the same ground precisely that preaching elders have it, namely, that they are members of the body to which the right appertains; and to deny this involves either that imposition of hands is no part of ordination, or that ordination is not by the Presbytery, both of which are absurd, and contrary to express law; or that ruling elders may be denied any participation in a part of ordination, which is expressly declared to belong to the whole Presbytery; and if this can be done, then they can, on the

same grounds, be deprived of all participation in all parts of ordination, and that act cease to be presbyterial, and become merely hierarchic, as to every part of it ; which is precisely the tendency of the greater part of the arguments I have heard and read on the other side. Furthermore, upon the same grounds precisely, the ruling elders ought to be deprived (and if they tolerate the present encroachment, they will be deprived at last) of all right to take any part in installing, removing, and judging ministers, as well as in ordaining them; for the whole four powers are of one and the same class, and are embraced and invested by a single clause (Form of Government, Chap. x., Sec. 8,) of the Constitution. There is full as much sense in the notion that an elder cannot take away the ministerial office because he cannot give it, as in that so current amongst us, that he cannot give it because he has it not himself; and there is far more reason to say he shall in no case take part in installations than to prohibit the imposition of his hands, since the latter act is only and always presbyterial, while the former one may be done by committee. (Form of Government, Chap. xvi., Sec. 6.) And surely it is far more evident that when ministers are installed by a committee of ministers, ruling elders can have no right to take part in removing them, seeing they had none in placing them, than it is that they cannot impose hands in ordination, even though ordination be an act of Presbytery only, and they members of the body. The truth is, sir, the whole matter resolves itself into one of these four propositions: either the imposition of hands is not a Presbyterial act, which is exactly contrary to the words of the Constitution; or Presbyterial acts may be performed where there is no Presbyterial authority, which is absurd and revolutionary; or ruling elders, when members of Presbytery, must unite in the act, which is true; or you must show an explicit statement in the Constitution, not only that a Presbytery is good without them—which the Synod asserts and the Constitution denies—but that even when they are present, they are denied this right ; that is, that even when members, they are not members.

Extraordinary as the attempt is, gentlemen of high character in the Church have been found willing to undertake the proof of

the proposition that ruling elders, when members of Presbytery, are, *pro hac vice*, not members of it. They try to show this, first, analogically, as a thing that might be; for as there are other rights of which they are deprived, they might also be deprived of this; and the instance taken is, they cannot be **moderators** of the body. I reply, this is by clear law of the Church; and as that law was requisite in order to obtain that result, the absence of any such law in regard to the point before us, is conclusive of the case. But seeing the law is positive against the thing which the analogy is supposed to prove to be possible, it is preposterous to argue for what might be, in the very teeth of what is. The Constitution might have allowed ministers to be ordained by committees of ministers; it chose another plan, and required them to be ordained by Presbytery; and it is argued that the elders may be ousted from Presbytery, of which they are members, because the plan of ordaining by committees, of which they were not members, might have been adopted. This is mere trifling. Another ground of argument is sought in a play upon the word "*ministry*," used at the close of the ordination, thus: "Prayer being ended, . . . *all the members of the Presbytery* in their order (shall) take him by the right hand, saying, *in words to this purpose*, We give you the right hand of fellowship to take part of this ministry with us" (Form of Government, Ch. xv., Sec. 14); and it is urged that *ministry* in this clause means ministry of the word, and therefore elders cannot use it. What then? Suppose they cannot do this, how does that prove they cannot impose hands? They cannot preside, but does that prove they cannot do something else which is different? Again, the man is already ordained; our argument is not about what may be done after, but in the act of ordaining. Again, suppose some other suitable word which an elder could use were substituted for the word *ministry*—the order being "*words to this purpose*;" how then? Again, the order is "*all the members* of the Presbytery;" are elders not members? But, chiefly, the whole sophism rests on an error of fact. The word *ministry* is, no doubt, in its popular use often, perhaps generally, applied to the ministers of the word; but our standards, and those of other Presbyterian

Churches, and our Bible, too, use it technically to mean all the divinely ordained officers of the Church. Our Confession says, “Christ hath given *the ministry* oracles and ordinances of God for *the gathering and perfecting* of the saints in this life to the end of the world,” (Ch. xxv., Sec. 3,) and our Form of Government declares that pastors, ruling elders, and deacons are the ordinary and perpetual officers of the Church, given to it by Christ, as already abundantly proved; therefore these standards must contradict themselves, or else in them, and so in this place, the word *ministry* does not mean simply the ministers of the word. The *Second Book of Discipline* of the Kirk of Scotland is equally explicit: “According to the parts of this division, (to wit, of the Policie of the Kirk,) ariseth a sort of threefold officers in the Kirk, to wit, of ministers preachers, elders governors, and deacons distributors. *And all these may be called by a generall word, ministers of the Kirk.*” (Ch. ii., Par. 2.)<sup>1</sup> Yes, sir, and our brother Paul is more explicit even than our brother Andrew Melville; for knowing that the Master had laid down and enforced in his own inexpressible humiliation the great truth that *minister* of the Church and *servant* of the Church are the very same thing,<sup>2</sup> he expressly declares that all the gifts of him who ascended far above all heavens, were for a work which he expresses by a word borrowed from the name of the humblest office in the Church—a *deaconry*—a *ministry*<sup>3</sup>; and seeing that he had called Christ himself *a minister, a servant*<sup>4</sup> for the truth of God, using the same word, when he speaks of himself and even of his apostolic office, he goes out of the circle of ecclesiastical phraseology, and selects a word lower than the lowest he could find there, to say, “So account of us as of the *ministers*<sup>5</sup> of Christ.” And has it really come to this, that *ministry* no longer

<sup>1</sup>See also in Niemeyer’s *Collectio Confessionum; Confessio Belgica*. Art. xxxi. *Confessio Helvetica posterior*, Art. xviii. *Confessio Bohemica* (1575), Art. xii.

<sup>2</sup>Matt. xx. 26-28, διάκονος—δοῦλος.

<sup>3</sup>Eph. iv. 8-13.

<sup>4</sup>Rom. xv. 8, διάκονον.

<sup>5</sup>1 Cor. iv. 1, ὑπηρέτας—the humble official attendants upon magistrates and courts.

means a service, *minister* no longer a servant? and that the preaching elders of this Church shall separate themselves from the profane herd of ruling elders, when the more sacred functions of their common rule are to be discharged, because the former are above that rank which Christ attributes to the highest, or because the latter are below even that service which, as the very humblest, Paul, in his humility, attributes to himself? And what shall justify this torture of our Constitution, that, in the midst of its groans, ministers who are unwilling to be classed with other servants of the Church may find some dubious sounds which they can interpret so as to favor their exalted conceptions of their official rank? *The practice of the Church! The practice of the Church!* What Church, sir? The same Church that declared the office of deacon to be divine and perpetual, and through a century and a half practised that it was neither one nor the other? The same Church that declared the pastoral office to be not only divine and permanent, but the first of all in “dignity and usefulness,” and after a century and a half not one-third of all its ministers had ever been pastors? The same Church that provides only for the ordination of pastors and evangelists, and then fills its Presbyteries with ministers who are neither one nor the other? The same Church that binds its evangelists by the most solemn vows to labor in frontier and destitute settlements, that is, to be real missionaries, and allows these same so-called evangelists to concentrate about the great marts of population, business, and wealth, and to spend their lives in utter disregard of the cries of our hundreds of, vacant churches, themselves absorbed all the while in secular pursuits? The same Church that, by solemn and deliberate treaty, provided for the abolition of the office of ruling elder, which office it professed to believe was *jure divino*, and covenanted to allow Presbyteries to be formed in direct violation of what it professed to believe was the divine model of Presbytery, and for six-and-thirty years tenaciously held by these monstrous stipulations? And as for the pretended practice—what is it? That elders *shall not* impose hands in the ordination of ministers of the word? I deny that any such practice ever did, or, from the nature of the case, ever could exist,

independently of clear law; or if it existed, could be proved in the manner here attempted. That elders *did not* so impose hands might be a practice and might be proved; but that they *should not* is a long step farther; and the moment this principle has been attempted to be asserted as the sense of the Church, it has created an excitement which it will require better arguments than the previous question to allay. That elders *did not* impose their hands *actually, is* asserted with great confidence to have been the uniform practice; the very *general* practice it may have been; the *universal* practice I have personal knowledge it was not, and that in portions of the Church the most thoroughly imbued with the principles of our system. That *potentially*, whoever did impose hands, did it as the act of the whole body, and therefore of the elders in the body, is just as clear as that when the candidate is ordained by the Moderator presiding—as by the words of our book he is—the ordination is potentially that of the body, and so is Presbyterian; and this is one manifest proof of the absurdity of talking about a practice that elders *should not* impose hands. Can any case be produced of elders having been turned out of Presbytery when the body was about to proceed to an ordination? Can any man produce an act of the General Assembly before 1843 sanctioning so portentous an outrage? If, so, let us have it. And suppose, sir, it could be proved with absolute certainty that elders never did lay on hands, would it be our duty to make the law conform to that practice? or ought we not rather correct the practice by the law? And suppose the provisions of the law were as vague as they are clear and precise, and one construction would favor the previous practice and understanding of the Church, while an opposite one accorded with the great principles of our system, and with the word of God; who could hesitate in such a case? I am fully persuaded that the opinions of the men who framed our system can be shown from their decided and well considered acts to have been wholly inconsistent with the view of this subject which is attempted to be fastened upon their memories; but I am also bound to say, that if every man of them were sitting in this Synod to-night, it would be your duty and my duty to take their

testimony as to the meaning of this instrument not a jot farther than that testimony accorded with the sense of the instrument itself. We have sworn to this Constitution, not in any hidden, reserved, or implicit sense, locked up in the minds of those who drew it up, and capable of being brought to light only by putting the thing to the rack; but we have sworn to it in its own sense, held forth in its own terms, and made obvious by the just consideration of all its parts, according to the fair, true, and simple meaning of the whole. And, sir, we should never have heard of the opinions of our fathers, and the practice of our Church—tradition and infallibility in Presbyterian Church courts—if gentlemen had been able to meet this question, upon the law and the testimony, either of the Church, or of the Church's glorious Head.

The methods of wresting the plain sense of written instruments, which I have now considered, and which, as you well know, are, as applied to our standards, and to the present case, common to nearly all who have lately spoken or written against the rights of our ruling elders, incompetent as they are in their own nature, and empty of all force, yet have a show of respect for the forms of reason, and for the established order of the Church. They pretend to ascertain the actual sense of actual law. But gentlemen take much higher grounds when such as these fail them, and with all their nervous anxiety for the reputation of the fathers of our Constitution, they do not hesitate to bring them and their handiwork to a very summary issue, by a very summary process. The ruling elder—so they argue—is, from the very nature of his office, incompetent even to assist in the ordination of preaching elders, and therefore it is impossible the Constitution can mean to say he ought to be allowed to do any such thing as impose hands on them. This, sir, is not to imitate, it is to judge our fathers; it is not to interpret, it is to try the law; it is not to execute, it is to make a Constitution. Yet I willingly meet the issue; and having, as I humbly conceive, proved that the law is what it is, will venture to offer some of those considerations which satisfy my mind that it ought not to be different.

The earliest national Confession of the Kirk of Scotland, that



read in the face of the Scottish Parliament and ratified by the three estates of the realm on the 17th of August, 1560, declares that the word of God truly preached, the sacraments rightly administered, and discipline executed according to the word of God, are the infallible signs of the true Church. (Art. xviii. and xxv.) The sacraments, adds this venerable Confession, can be rightly administered only by “lawful ministers, whom we affirm to be only they that are lawfully appointed to the preaching of the word, into whose mouth God hath put some sermon of exhortation, they being men lawfully chosen thereto by some Church.” (Art. xxii.) *John Knox* and four other persons composed this Confession; the same hands composed the *First Book of Discipline*. Treating expressly of the ministers of the word, this early platform of Church Order and Discipline declares that “the lawful vocation standeth in the election of the people, examination of the ministry, and' admission by both.” And then afterwards that, “In their admission . . . other ceremonies, except fasting with prayer, such as laying on of hands, we judge not necessary in the institution of the ministry.” (Ch. iv., paragraphs 1 and 2.) About twenty years after the adoption of this book, the *Second Book of Discipline* was drawn up by *Andrew Melville*, and adopted by all the civil and ecclesiastical authorities of the kingdom. It has been made the basis of more numerous and solemn national acts than any other paper, perhaps, of merely human origin; and as far as I can discover is still in full force in the Scottish Church and kingdom. This remarkable work treats in the same chapter, and as one general subject, the admission of all persons bearing ecclesiastical functions, to their office, and declares that “vocation or calling is common to all;” that “ordinary or outward calling hath two parts—election and ordination;” that election is the choosing by “the eldership and consent of the congregation;” that “ordination is the separation and sanctifying of the person appointed to God and his Kirk, after he is well tried and found qualified;” and that “the ceremonies of ordination are fasting, earnest prayer, and imposition of the hands of the eldership.” (Ch. iii., par. 1, 6, 10, 11.) Such is ordination according to the doctrine of that venerable

VOL. XXXIII., NO. 3—6.

Church whose standards have furnished so large a portion of our own, and such it is, essentially, as held by all the Reformed Churches, and I may add by the primitive and apostolic Church. There is no charm here—no mystery, no incantation, no juggle, no *opus operatum*, no symbolical hocus pocus, no transfer of a virus, no pretence of a flux of spiritual influences—nothing about a transmission of anything. The whole is simple and grand. God chooses his servants by an inward vocation, and designates a mode by which their outward calling may be regularly sealed, in a lawful election, and a solemn dedication of each to his appointed work; and this is all. What there can be in the doctrine of ordination properly conceived that should make one shudder at the idea, as at profanation and sacrilege, that a ruling elder should be presumed competent to aid in the ordination of a preaching elder, is to me altogether incomprehensible. Or if gentlemen insist that I do not fairly state the case—or the exact point of their objection, and are in earnest when they make a distinction between the act of imposing hands and all other parts of ordination, why let us give them the benefit of this correction. And what is there in the nature of this act, which was entirely rejected by the early Scottish Church, that renders it improper for a scriptural presbyter, yea, a scriptural bishop, to take part in it? To deny that the elders of the New Testament *are presbyters* is mere nonsense, for the English word is only a translation of the Greek one, and is just the same as to say an elder is not an elder, or to say a presbyter is not a presbyter. To deny that the elders of the New Testament are bishops is to contradict the very words of the divine record, for the very same men and offices have both words indiscriminately applied to them, and to set up Prelacy upon a foundation stronger than its own advocates assume. To take refuge under the distinction held by Presbyterian Churches in general, that there are two classes of scriptural elders, namely, such as rule only, and such as both rule and labor in word and doctrine, is but to betray ignorance of the whole subject. For you will be obliged to go a step further, and either show that ordination does not appertain to the power of *regimen* in the Church, but to the power of *order*—which is stark Popery,

or else that those who are elders simply *for rule*, do not belong to those bodies which have the entire *regimen* of the Church in their hands—which is stark nonsense. Sir, I do beseech this Synod to consider these obvious truths, every one of which is so perfectly simple as to be, upon our common principles, pretty nearly self-evident, as soon as it is put clearly before an unprejudiced mind. Let it be once conceded, as it is on all hands, that imposition of hands, if practised at all, is a part of the ordination service, and then it follows irresistibly, from the truths just stated, and from each of them separately, that ruling elders ought to lay on hands, and, therefore, that our law is right. *Presbytery* imposes hands in ordination; elders are of right members of that body; therefore they must necessarily impose hands. *Presbyters*, when met in Presbytery, ordain by the imposition of hands; elders are presbyters, and do meet in that body; therefore they must impose hands. *Bishops* are presbyters with cure of souls, and therefore sit as members and unite in imposing hands; elders are presbyters, with cure of souls, and so are bishops, and therefore must impose hands. The power of *order* is a several power, such as the power to preach, administer sacraments, &c.; but imposition of hands, with every other part of ordination, is a presbyterial, that is a *joint* power; therefore a minister of the word does not impose hands as a minister, nor as exercising any power of *order*, but as a ruler, that is an elder, and therefore upon the same ground as elders of the other class, that is ruling elders. All power of *regimen* is *joint*, that is, presbyterial, for the whole rule of the Church, as I have largely demonstrated in a former speech before this Synod, is in assemblies; but imposition of hands, and every other part of ordination, is a presbyterial, that is a *joint* power; and therefore all who have the power of rule must have the right to impose hands.<sup>1</sup> And, sir, if we look at the

---

<sup>1</sup>The reader is referred for a very clear and learned demonstration that ruling elders are both presbyters and bishops, to Dr. Miller's Essay on the Ruling Elder. That upon the ground of their being rulers, they imposed hands, is clearly proved in the Essay of Mr. Thornwell, referred to in the previous speech. See also Second Book of Discipline, and Owen's Gospel Church, for the nature of joint and several power. And see also the Spirit of the XIX. Century for October, 1842, for a fuller statement.

subject in the opposite aspect, it is equally overwhelming. Are these elders scriptural presbyters? If not, let them depart from your Church courts. Are your Presbyteries scripturally composed when teaching and ruling elders meet together in them? If not, let us break up our system, and confess our errors like honest men. Does the right of ordination belong to the power of *order*, and is it transmitted ministerially by the imposition of hands? Then let us turn Papists at once, and establish the sacrament of orders. Is parity a distinctive feature of Presbyterianism? Then how shall we defend this more than prelatic imparity? For the highest churchman on earth admits all presbyters to be by order equal—all bishops to be of the same rank; nay, while their prelates ordain their presbyters, they allow other presbyters to assist and impose hands. If these are our opinions, and we are determined to make our standards utter such principles as these, let us at least avoid the charge of handling the word of God deceitfully, by citing and stereotyping texts in a sense the opposite of our belief. Our Form of Government (Ch. viii., Sec. 1 and 2) quotes Acts xv. 6, to prove the government of the church to be *jure divino*, in assemblies congregational, classical, and synodical; and then in Ch. x., Sec. 1, and Ch. xi., on the title, it quotes the same passage to prove that, *jure divino*, classical and synodical assemblies are composed of pastors and ruling elders. In Ch. xv., Sec. 14, 1 Tim. iv., 14, is quoted to prove that in ordination the hands of the Presbytery ought to be imposed; and in Ch. x., Sec. 1, the same passage is quoted to prove that many congregations are united in one Presbytery composed of pastors and ruling elders. So that holding ruling elders to be incompetent to impose hands, we quote a passage which proves that Presbytery ordains by imposition of hands, and quote it again to prove that ruling elders as well as preaching elders were in that Presbytery. And holding that the power of regimen held by ruling elders does not qualify them to act in a matter which falls immediately and absolutely under the power of an assembly having rule, we quote a passage to prove, in the first place, that this assembly has the power of rule, and in the second, that ruling elders were in it! The passage in Timothy puts it

out of dispute that the body which ordains is a Presbytery, and that it ordains with imposition of its hands while that in Acts is equally conclusive that it had jurisdiction, and that the elders who sat in it were all neither more nor less than presbyters. Here, sir, I may boldly take my stand. These marginal citations clearly prove by Scripture that the doctrine asserted in our standards is that which I assert before you now, and that the men who put them there and have kept them there understood these standards to teach this doctrine. Assemblies which have rule in the Church—which are composed of teaching and ruling elders, and are therefore called Presbyteries—ordain ministers of the word by the imposition of the hands of their members without discrimination. This is the doctrine of these standards and of God’s word. And, sir, I invoke your solemn consideration of the state of the question to which the whole argument conducts us. The whole office of the ruling elder is involved. His power to ordain depends on his power to rule, and they stand or fall together. His position under our Constitution and by the word of God is determined by the same argument, and will be decided by the same vote. With him falls the grand peculiarity of Presbyterian, and, as I believe, of Christian, Church Order. And if the opinions now predominant in this Synod prevail over the Church, a revolution in every part of your ecclesiastical practice and opinion must follow, perhaps insensibly, but not the less fatally; and the final assumption of all authority into the hands of the ministers will bring after it those results and that ruin which we have seen in all ages flow from that frightful calamity.

I will venture, Moderator, to go a step farther in, this investigation, and meet in its germ what seems to be the radical error of those who deny the principles for which I contend. Their immediate error lies in a misconception of the power which is exercised in ordination, and from thence, very naturally, a mistake arises as to the depositories of this power. I have entered the less fully into this part of the case, both because I have clearly exhibited its principles in my argument before the Synod on the question of *jurisdiction* as involved in that of *a quorum* of Presbytery, and because of the painful and embarrassing circumstances

in which I am addressing you. But I have probably said enough to make it apparent that the denial of this right of ruling elders, for which I plead, must rest at last, if it has any rational foundation, upon the double assumption that ministerial ordination depends upon and is related, somehow or other, to the *potestas ordinis*, and that this dependence and relation are such that it is the *potestas ordinis* of ministers of the word only that is available in the ordination of other ministers of the word. The question of imposition of hands is only the touchstone that reveals the existence of these two fallacies, either one of which, fairly pursued, annihilates the whole fabric of that church order, whose fundamental principles, both as they are rational and as they are scriptural, are that ordination, as well as jurisdiction, is not a several power, but a joint one, and that both are in the hands of assemblies constituted, not of one, but of two classes of elders. But there is an error behind both of these, and to which both are traceable—as to the very tenure of all power held by the officers of the Church of Christ. If the power held by the assemblies or the officers of the Church was absolute in its nature, and held in the way of sovereign and inherent right, there might be a very remote approach to plausibleness, perhaps, in a great deal that has been said and written on this question. But, sir, all the powers we hold, or can hold, in the Church, are utterly and immeasurably removed from the nature of absolute authority. All power is absolutely in Christ; he gave—but *only in trust*—to his inspired apostles authority to found and shape his kingdom; to that kingdom he gives officers, who are not inspired; and to these he gives—but *also in trust*—powers very much inferior, both in kind and in degree, to those he gave, in trust and temporarily, to his apostles. The apostles, far above us in all respects, had nothing to *transmit*, in any proper sense of that word, as of themselves, or even as officers of Christ's Church; but when Christ chose to add to them other apostles, they numbered one of them with themselves<sup>1</sup>—they gave another the right hand of fellowship

---

<sup>1</sup>That is on the supposition that Matthias was, in any true sense, an apostle. The competency of the apostles to do what they did in his case—especially before the descent of the Holy Ghost—the almost total subse-

after he had been, independently of them, for many years an apostle. So we, as ministers of the word, or as rulers in the Church, have nothing *to transmit*. Our business in this respect is simply, when God shows to us that he has chosen another minister, another ruler, to add him to our number, to give him the right of fellowship; to do this by such acts and such significant ceremonies (of which we suppose the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery is one) as the first, the great servants of our Lord have, by his orders, instituted. The mode of arguing that men cannot impart what they have not, and, therefore, elders cannot act, implies that we can impart what we have, to wit—if the argument has any sense—our divine calling, and sufficiency, and unction from above. But will any Presbyterian maintain a doctrine so monstrous? And yet, upon any other ground, the sophism is a mere play on words. For what sane man will venture to say a trust can never be executed unless the trustee has exactly the same interest, both in kind and in degree, that *he* has upon whom the trust terminates? For example, that Christ could not, either permanently or temporarily, empower kings to select prophets, or prophets to select kings, preachers to select rulers in the Church, or rulers to select preachers, or both unitedly to select both, just as readily, as simply, yea, reverently speaking, just as rationally, as to direct preachers to select preachers—he himself, by his Spirit, his providence, and his word, for ever superintending the whole? Why, sir, even under the Jewish economy, when a priesthood was not only divinely instituted, but continued in a right line from Aaron by a special providence attesting that divine institution, and intrusion into it was punished by death, the priests were subjected to the inspection and the decision of the elders, who were judges and rulers, and of whom not a single man was, by any necessity, a priest himself, in order to ascertain

---

quent silence in regard to him, the probable limitation of the true apostolate to the number of twelve, and the transcendent claims of Paul to be the twelfth, are some of the reasons which cast doubt on the vocation of Matthias. But, admitting it to have been proper and valid, he was chosen by means of an *extraordinary* appeal to God, and was simply *numbered* with the rest, according to the argument of the speech.

the reality of their call of God, as to birth, age, physical, social, and ceremonial facts, which settled the right of each particular priest to be admitted to offer sacrifice; and Moses, who was no priest, but a ruler, consecrated Aaron and his sons. Those priests were, by a divine law, entitled to their office; but the conditions of entrance, and the proof of their claim, must necessarily be passed on by some competent authority, which authority was the elders of Israel. So with us, a ministry appointed of Christ, and its members called and qualified by Christ, have a divine right to the exercise of the functions belonging to their respective offices; but it necessarily must be that some competent authority in the Church must pass upon these facts, and the Christian people and the elders of the Church are that authority—the former by their call, the latter by their ordination, attesting and giving outward regularity to the vocation of each person in particular. The whole notion of a *transmitted* authority in the Christian ministry is utterly fallacious; and the whole assumption that, if there was such a transmission, it must be through a succession of the same description of persons, is a second and still more absurd fallacy, built upon the first. Nor are these fallacies barren speculations. We see their first influence in the violent advocacy of principles in our own Church which are wholly subversive of its order, and in the harsh and intemperate conduct and sentiments which so remarkably accompany those principles; and we may read the fearful record of their progress and results in every age and period where the *heirarchic* spirit and doctrine have been engrafted upon Christianity. Sir, the whole conception is as thoroughly at war with history as it is with reason and with Scripture. There is not only no such doctrine in God's word, but there is no such ministry upon the earth; and if the right to preach or to rule in the Church of Christ depends on our ability to trace a transmitted authority through the imposition of the hands of other preachers or rulers, then it is manifest that there is not in the world one person who has the right either to rule or to preach. The moment it is proved that these rights are *transmitted* rights, which must come to us only through officers like ourselves, back to the Saviour, that moment it is proved that there is not under the sun



anything approaching to a valid ministry; for, as to the matter of fact, not only is it utterly impossible to trace back any such succession—and so the proof is fatally defective—but it is capable of the clearest proof that every existing line of such pretended succession has been repeatedly and incurably broken. As it regards this pretended transmission, it is perfectly notorious that the leaders of the glorious Reformation of the sixteenth century came, every one of them, out of the Church of Rome; that they renounced, every one of them, that Church as the synagogue of Satan; that they relied, every one of them, on the extraordinary nature of their own vocation to justify their acts, and not on any ordination they ever had from Rome; and that in the exercise of the powers vested by Christ *in his Church*—which is his body—they established, one and all, the broad foundations of truth, on which we stand until now. Here, sir, is the only succession that the nature of the case admits—the only permanent, available, scriptural succession; the succession of heaven-descended truth, and of the glorious fellowship, the redeemed host to which officers and courts are both alike given; the succession of Christ's doctrine and Christ's people—now here, now there—sometimes on the throne of Constantine, sometimes in the dungeons of the Inquisition—sometimes fully organised, sometimes disorganised—but everywhere the inheritors of the promises, the depositaries of the faith, the witnesses for the truth, the royal priesthood. To his Church the Saviour has given a form of administration; to it, officers, to conduct its affairs; but the succession is neither in the form, nor in the officer, but in the truth, and in itself.<sup>1</sup> And when the form is corrupted or debased, it is its prerogative to restore it; and when the officers are extinct, or are apostate, it is its prerogative, obedient to God's providence, and guided by his indwelling spirit, to call forth from its bosom new teachers and new rulers. Again and again has it done both—shut up to the necessity by a divine *constraint*, and rewarded for its obedience by the divine smiles. And, sir, I pray God it may never be forgotten, that in the primitive Church the hierarchic spirit first

---

<sup>1</sup>See Turret in III., pp. 240-9. Loc. 24, Qum. 23. Magdeburg Centuriators, Cent. I., pp. 292, 391, 514; Cent. II., p. 130; Cent. III., p.254. VOL. XXXIII., NO. 3-7.

manifested itself, and laid the first principles of Prelacy and Popery by the well-meant but fatal error of selecting one of the presbyters, and giving to him the sole power of ordination<sup>2</sup>—an error slight in its extent, compared with what we shall commit, if we, instead of a temporary and prudential, though illegal and dangerous, elevation of a single minister above his class, should by one blow divide into two different orders the presbyters of the Church, and while we elevate one above the Church itself, degrade the other from the exercise of the common functions of their office. The act that converts Presbyterian ordination from an exercise of church power into a charm will work sorrow and ruin, when you and I, Moderator, shall have long ceased from our labors, and will be cited by our mourning children with an emphasis little according with the temper in which those around me have received my earnest warnings.

I think, sir, I have now shown that, by our law as it stands, the principles of the minute I have submitted to this Synod are clearly established, and that the more closely we apply the tests of reason, of history, and of Scripture, the more evident it is that our law is right. The work of ordaining ministers of the word is, and ought to be, the work of a Presbytery constituted by teaching and ruling elders; and the imposition of hands belongs to the same body which performs all the rest of the work. The doctrine and practice of other Reformed Churches have been confidently appealed to as conclusive against the view which I take of this subject. The *practice* of other Churches I do not pretend to have sufficiently examined into to speak with confidence about it; nor indeed does it appear to me a point of sufficient importance to be worthy of discussion, under the circumstances. If there was a total absence of written law, if that law was vague, if there was any tolerable certainty that the practice of Churches always accorded strictly with their own law, if there was the least pretext that all the particular churches do not require frequent reformations themselves, or if we had certain information, and a uniform practice, there might be some inducement to look

---

<sup>1</sup>See Hieron, ad Evagrium. Also, Magdeburg Centuriators, Cent. II., p. 125.

into this idlest, vaguest, weakest part of the most uncertain of all rules of duty—the opinions of men as weak, as ignorant, and as sinful as ourselves. The *doctrine* of other Reformed Churches I have considered as standing in a different light, and have carefully examined it, especially as it is set forth in their public and formal standards. There are many reasons why these authorised and carefully weighed statements are worthy of our profound respect; for, to state no more, they were drawn up by men, and approved by Churches, whom God evidently called to a glorious mission, and their influence in giving shape and tone to our own formularies was very great. After all, however, their relations to us and to this question are but collateral; for the word of God is our rule of faith; the standards of our own Church are our covenanted bond of union; and in the light of them, we have not hesitated to reject important principles which were held with unanimous consent by the Reformed Churches of Europe, and to establish others which were denied by them all. I say not these things, sir, as fearing the testimony which these venerable witnesses, and all others, back to the apostles, who are recognised as parts of the elect Church of Christ, may bear, for the course of my studies has not left me ignorant of the sentiments of God's people in past times; but I say them in all candor, and because I love truth more than victory. I the more willingly proceed to this portion of the case, because I am persuaded that this testimony is not only more for me than against me, in itself considered, but because the distinct rejection by the framers of our constitution of such parts of the doctrine of older Reformed Churches as was opposite to the principles held by me, is no mean proof that I rightly interpret our own standards.

<sup>1</sup>I will begin with the Reformed Church of France—a Church which has suffered for the Lord Jesus the most and the longest of

---

<sup>1</sup>The reader is notified that this portion of the speech is reported much more fully than it was delivered—the Synod being thin (though the audience was large), the hour drawing on towards midnight, and other causes, which need not be repeated, conspiring to render its delivery useless, if not improper. I have hesitated about going into this part of the subject; but, on the whole, it seems best.

all the Churches of the Reformation; a Church which furnished, in less than ten years, more than two hundred thousand martyrs, and in whose bosom many particular congregations could count their confessors by tens of thousands.<sup>1</sup> Sir, there is no portion of the history of the visible Church of Christ upon which the serious mind lingers with more profound interest than that which records the wonderful dealings of God with the Christians of France. In defiance of the whole power of Rome, and of a succession of persecuting sovereigns, they spread abroad with such astonishing rapidity that the National Synod of 1571, in which *Beza* presided, could count 2,150 churches, the greater part of which had two ministers, and many of them five or six;<sup>2</sup> and they shot their roots so deeply, that two centuries and a half of war, persecution, exile, and civil infamy, aided by frequent and wide-spread apostasies, great and dangerous departures from the simplicity of the gospel, and an original constitution by no means perfect, have failed in extirpating them from the soil of France. The confession of this Church was drawn up, as is generally supposed, by *John Calvin* himself, and was adopted by several of its National Synods, including the first of the twenty-nine, which met at Paris on the 15th May, 1559. By it<sup>3</sup> ministers of the word were ordained by committee, which always consisted of two pastors deputed by a provincial Synod or a Colloquy (Presbytery) (Discipline, Ch. i., Can. 8); they were never ordained before being admitted by a Synod or Colloquy, and if by the latter, seven pastors must be present (*Idem*, Can. 4); never without the consent of the people, and never without a particular flock (*Idem*, Can. 6 and 10). The Colloquy consisted of neighboring churches, and was constituted of their ministers and an elder from each (Ch. vii., Can. 1); and their provincial Synod answered to ours (Ch. viii., Can. 1). The Consistory corresponded with our church session, and consisted of the pastors and elders of the particular church (Ch. v., Can. 8); but these particular churches were often very large, many of them having more than 10,000 members,

---

<sup>1</sup>Quick's Synodicon, Vol. I., Introduction, pp. 59, 60.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup>See it., Synodicon, Vol. T., pp. 6-58, Introduction.

and they had generally a plurality of pastors. The Consistory, as well as the Colloquy and the Synod, had power to suspend ministers of the word-yea, to depose them outright (Ch. i., Can. 19 and 50, and Ch. y., Can. 19 and 32); and I greatly fear, sir, if some of our leading divines were to come under the scope of some of these canons, it might go ill with them; for example, Chap. i., Can. 19, against all secular pursuits, that too much hinder “them in the principal duties of their ministerial office,” such as the practice of law or physic, the teaching of youth, or “any other worldly distracting business,” which are the cases stated in the canon. This platform differs from ours in many particulars, and in many more from the interpretations forced upon ours. By it, ordination is by *committee* of two ministers, instead of by the Presbytery with imposition of its hands; it is by *pastors* only, who are the only sort of ministers of the word admitted into the church courts, instead of by three ministers without charge, as defined by our last Assembly; the Colloquy must consist of at least *seven pastors*, instead of three unemployed ministers, which, gentlemen say, are sufficient; by it, the church session could suspend, yea, “depose out of hand,” ministers of the word—a notion so revolting to our late General Assembly that they declared ministers to be not church members at all, rather than allow their names and sacred persons to fall under the notice of a church session; and, above all, by it, ruling elders are expressly held not to be perpetual officers in the Church (Ch. iii., Can. 7; also, Ch. xi. of the Second Synod of Paris, 1565). All these things bear a strong resemblance to the well known peculiarities of *Calvin*; and, following the general principles on which they rest, he engrafted into the discipline of the Church of Geneva their most aggravated form.<sup>1</sup> He held, and avowed his belief,

---

<sup>1</sup>The government of the Church of Geneva was established by a municipal law passed by the “Syndics, the small and the grand councils, and the assembled people of Geneva.” By it, persons seeking the ministry of the word were examined by the “company of pastors” in their weekly meeting, elected by the same body, with the concurrence of the small municipal council, announced from the pulpits on one Sabbath, and if no objections were made, presented before the pulpit the next Sabbath, and prayer offered by the officiating minister; afterwards, being taken to

that “imposition of hands” is “*a sacrament* in true and legitimate ordinations;”<sup>1</sup> an opinion difficult to reconcile with his general sentiments, and altogether peculiar to himself, but which, it is easy to see, would naturally lead to exactly such practical results as I have stated from the French Confession. Let it be observed, also, that whatever there is peculiar in this platform is so by express law, and that in so far as its provisions are opposed to the principles for which I contend, they are opposed also to the express law of our Church; for if ruling elders are not perpetual officers of the Church, and if imposition of hands in legitimate ordinations is a sacrament, then, indeed, it is true enough that neither elders nor Presbyteries should impose hands, but that *pastors* only should do it. The whole argument, therefore, is conclusive to this: that, even according to the judgment of Calvin and the Reformed Church of France, our views of the office of the ruling elder, of the nature of ordination, of the power of the Presbytery, and of the total separation of Church and State, which in Geneva were strictly united, necessarily oblige us to allow the imposition of the hands of the ruling elders; and the adoption of the principles of that great man and the practice of

---

the council, they took a minute and comprehensive civic oath before the Lords Syndics; and thus their examination, institution, and form of induction were complete, without one word about a Presbytery, an elder, or imposition of hands by anybody. The elders were elected from year to year by the small council, with the advice of the ministers; there were twelve of them—two from the small council, and ten indiscriminately from the Councils of Sixty and of Two Hundred; they were proclaimed from the pulpits to allow of objections, and were confirmed by the Council of Two Hundred, and took the civic oath. Synod, Presbytery, Colloquy—there was none. The Consistory, or church session, was made up of “the elders, with the ministers,” and there seems to have been one for the whole city. By the “Summary of Doctrine, &c.,” it is explicitly taught that “the church ought to be governed *by the pastors*, who have charge of preaching the word and administering the sacraments.” See *Les Ordonnances Ecclesiastiques de L’Eglise de Geneve, passées et revues au Conseil General, le 3 de Juin, 1676—A Geneve, 1609*. The whole system is as different from ours as well can be, both in its principles and its details.

<sup>1</sup>Institutes, Book iv., Ch. 19, Sec. 28 and 31, p. 626-8, of Vol. ii., of the edition of the Presbyterian Board of Publication.

that noble Church, from whom we have ventured to differ in these particulars, would oblige us to alter entirely our principles upon these four important points—that, is, to refuse elders the right of imposing hands, upon the united authority of the Churches of France and Geneva, it is necessary to hold that they are not perpetual officers, that imposition of hands is virtually a sacrament, and that it appertains, not to the Presbytery, but to a committee or other meeting of pastors, appointed by some competent authority, civil or ecclesiastical, and that the State itself has paramount authority in the premises. It is needless to say that the doctrine of the Church of France is to be sought only in the past. For one hundred and eighty-five years no National Synod has met; since the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, one hundred and fifty-eight years ago, no ordinary and regularly constituted church court has been lawfully convened; and for one hundred and eight years of this period, from 1685 to 1793, the Reformed religion was prohibited by law, and persecuted unto blood in that deluded land. In 1814 Napoleon restored this Church of martyrs to the condition essentially in which it now stands; for the freedom of religion secured by the charter of 1831 has proved, under the growing influence of Popery in France, a mere illusion. At present, the ruling elders of the French churches are created by the civil law, being a certain number of persons in each church who pay the most taxes to the State, and the ordinations of its ministers are performed by meetings of ministers convened spontaneously for this purpose, as necessity requires; so that it is virtually, and has been for about two centuries past, a Presbyterian Church robbed of the power of setting up or continuing the regular administration of its affairs. Would to God that its day of deliverance had come; and until it does come, let the Reformed world remember these dear brethren in bonds, and unitedly plead their glorious cause at the throne of our common Saviour.

I pass next to the most remarkable Confession to which the Reformation gave birth—the one which undoubtedly deserves to be called more emphatically *the Confession of the Reformed Churches* than any other composed during the sixteenth century. At a period of great difficulty and doubt, when the hatred of the

Papists burned with intense fury, and the bitterness of the Lutheran section of the Protestants against those who followed Zwingli and Calvin was excited to a degree that seems to us now inconceivable, the Confession commonly called the *second or latter Helvetic Confession*, drawn up by *Henry Bullinger* of Zurich, and put forth under the auspices of the Elector Palatine Frederick, then the Chief Protector of the Reformed, was, during the year 1566, adopted by all the Churches of the Helvetic Confederation, with those of their allies and dependencies, embracing Geneva, which did not then form a part of the confederacy, but whose national Church, with Theodore Beza at its head, subscribed this Confession. During the same and the following year the Church of Scotland, the Churches of Poland, of Hungary, and in general the body of the Reformed throughout Europe, adhered to this Confession, as embodying the grand peculiarities by which they were separated from the Lutherans on the one hand, and still more widely from the Papists on the other.<sup>1</sup> The 18th Chapter of this Confession treats "*Of the ministers of the Church, and their institution and offices,*" and occupies seven pretty closely printed pages. After a page and upwards of precedent matter, it treats of the "*Ministers of the New Testament,*" which, it says, "are called apostles, prophets, evangelists, bishops, presbyters, pastors, and doctors;" which defining in that order, it says of *bishops*, "they are inspectors and overseers of the church, who dispense food and necessaries to the church;" of *presbyters*, "they are elders (*seniores*), and as it were senators and fathers of the church, governing it with wholesome counsel;" of *pastors*, "they keep the fold of the Lord, and provide for it necessary things;" of *doctors*, "they instruct and teach true faith and piety." And the conclusion is that these are the present ministers of the Church, and these their names. A little further on the subject treated is, "*That ministers are to be called and chosen;*" they are to be chosen "by the church, or by those deputed for this purpose by the church;"—such persons only as are described in 1 Tim. iii., and in Tit. i., are to be chosen. "*Et*

---

<sup>1</sup>See the Confession itself, pp. 462-536 of Niemeyer's Coll., and some account of it in his preface, pp. lxiii-lxviii.



*qui electi sunt, ordinentur a senioribus cum orationibus publicis, et impositione manuum: And those who are chosen ought to be ordained by elders, with public prayers, and imposition of hands.*" (Pp. 507-8.) Towards the end of the Chapter, discipline in general and discipline amongst ministers is treated, and then Synods incidentally, in which "the life and doctrine of ministers ought to be diligently inquired into. Those who sin are to be reprehended *by the elders (senioribus)* and brought back to the way, if they are curable, or *deposed . . .* if they are incurable." (P. 512.) Now, sir, according to the doctrine of the Reformed Churches in general, are there any officers whose duty it is to be church governors? In your own Constitution you say there are, and that their office is to rule, and their name is ruling elders. (Form of Gov., Ch. v.) And this renowned Confession bears you out. Is there any Presbyterian Church which holds that there is a class of ruling officers whose special duty it is to be senators, governing the church, and these officers are not elders? If there is, tell us its name. But here we have amongst the permanent officers of the Church, a class set down, called from the Greek *presbyters*, from the Latin *seniors*, in English *elders*, who are the especial governors of the church, and to whom, by this Confession, it specially appertains to ordain all ministers, and that with imposition of hands. This is just the doctrine which I have endeavored to set forth—that *the power of ordination is in church rulers*, and therefore in *all elders*, because elder and ruler are essentially one. And as if to put the matter out of dispute, the subject is closed with the declaration that they who *depose* and they who *ordain* are the same.<sup>1</sup> Sir,

---

<sup>1</sup>See the whole subject of imposition of hands largely treated by Selden in his Commentary on Eutychius, Sec. 10, in Vol. II., pp. 435-44 of his works. See also De Moor Com. in Johan. Marck, cap. xxxiii. De Regimine Ecc., Sec. 16. This worthy old drudge (De Moor), arguing that elders and deacons ought not to be ordained with imposition of hands, says, quoting Spanheim, "Nec satis esse credit pro dignitate et prærogativa ministerii sacri, si eodem quo ipsi pastures ritu rusticelli sæpe et cerdones et idiotæ inaugurentur." Tom. vi., p. 330. Certainly if the Dutch ministers considered it disgraceful that farmers, tradesmen, and numsculls should be ordained by the same rite they were, it is  
VOL. XXXIII., NO. 3—8.

when I remember that this Confession had the immortal names of *Knox, Beza, and Bullinger* subscribed to it, I am consoled under the deep affliction of not being able to agree with gentlemen whose acquaintance with the repositories of truths which many think ought to decide these questions, has at length extended to a sight of the books, and whose discrimination has led them to argue, as if the order of the Church of God depended on the distinction between the *quorum of* a Presbytery and the Presbytery itself.

It would be easy to establish the same doctrine from other Confessions—for example, those of the Bohemian Churches, of 1535 and of 1575, and various Professions of the Polish and Lithuanian Churches of the following century. I pass, however, to the Kirk of Scotland. In the first and many succeeding General Assemblies of that Kirk, the great majority of the members were ruling elders. Indeed, in 1560, when the first one met, there appear to have been only twelve Reformed preachers in the whole kingdom.<sup>1</sup> By the First Book of Discipline, which was adopted in 1561, imposition of hands in ordination was, as we have already seen, declared to be unnecessary, and for about twenty years seems not to have been used. It is also true that during this period there was not in all Scotland a single Presbytery, according to our ideas of such a court, nor anything exactly answering to it.<sup>2</sup> It is not important to us now to inquire how far these defects might impair the *regularity* of ordinations considered merely as to their form, since I should hope no one here would venture to contend that their substantial *validity* could be in any degree affected by them. Yet it is obvious that in such a condition ordinations, as now in France, must have been performed in some way which it would puzzle sticklers of various descriptions to bring within the rules of their respective

---

quite natural that American ministers should consider it an impeachment of their dignity and prerogative to have this rite performed by such folks.

<sup>1</sup>Hetherington's Hist. Church of Scotland, pp. 84, 88, 89.

<sup>2</sup>See Baillie's Letters, (edition of 1842), Vol. II, p. 505 and p. 182, and Hetherington, p. 182.

theories. Perhaps they ordained by Synods—which, indeed, are but Presbyteries at last; and, having, in primitive times, been only occasional and extraordinary, have for several centuries been stated and ordinary courts. Perhaps they did it by a sort of parochial presbytery, or church session of some collegiate charge, or some joint meeting of two or three adjacent congregations, by the whole body of ministers and all the elders of them, which was a sort of model out of which the “elderships” of the Second Book of Discipline grew; and if they did, they had, if we dare credit learned men, the example of all primitive antiquity,<sup>1</sup> if not of the churches founded by the apostles themselves, if their order is rightly expounded by the Westminster Assembly;<sup>2</sup> for that venerable Synod, so far from denying, has indeed by implication, if not in terms, admitted, strange as the doctrine may sound to this Synod, that any single congregation that cannot conveniently associate, may assume to itself all and sole power in ordination, though this is a proceeding very requisite to be avoided, when it can be conveniently.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps they ordained by the General Assembly itself; we know certainly that the time-honored Assembly of 1638 did, *ex mero motu*, in open session, depose two archbishops and four prelatic bishops, and that various Assemblies since have exercised powers commonly allowed to go along with the power to ordain. Or possibly they ordained by committees of church courts, up even to the Assembly; for I find that the Assemblies of 1642 and 1643 did both empower a committee sent to Ireland “to try and ordain such as shall be found qualified for the ministrie.”<sup>4</sup> And it is not a little remarkable that the “Petition of the Distressed Professors in Ireland,” which led to these appointments, should have contained a prophecy, which, at the end of two centuries, is fulfilled before our eyes. “The day may come,” say these faithful men, hoping against hope in

---

<sup>1</sup>Sir Peter King’s Inquiry into the Primitive Church, Ch. iv.

<sup>2</sup>See its Chapter headed “Of Classical Assemblies.”

<sup>3</sup>Form of Gov. of the Westminster Assembly, third paragraph of the division entitled “Touching the power of ordination.” Duncan’s Collections, p. 177.

<sup>4</sup>Printed Acts, p. 152 and p. 191.

the midst of the ruin of their Church and the desolation of their country, brought about by the papal massacre of 1641, "the day may come when a General Assembly in this land may return to you the first fruits of thanks for the plants of your free gift."<sup>1</sup> The day has come, sir, and nobly has the Church of Ireland redeemed the obligations of this ancient pledge. As I have allowed myself to be seduced into this train of observation, I may as well say in the same connexion, that my views upon the whole question to which they relate will be entirely mistaken, if any one supposes that I call in question ordinations performed in either of the ways referred to. I do not. What I contend for is, that ordination is in the hands of all such as have rule in the church; that regularly this power is to be exercised by Church assemblies in which these rulers sit; and that ruling elders cannot be deprived of their part in this act of authority when they are present and members of the court. It is true I have, on a previous day, attempted to prove that, according to our written law, there can be no Presbytery in our Church without the presence of ruling elders, and that this law is good and right in a settled Church state; and it plainly follows from that argument, that if our Presbyteries cannot constitute, manifestly they cannot ordain, in the absence of ruling elders. But the converse does not follow; for ruling elders might not be indispensable to the constitution of the court, and yet it might be a gross outrage upon law, upon truth, and upon propriety, to make them stand aside as incompetent, when they are present as members; and it is upon this obvious distinction that I have thought it worth while to argue this question, after the decisive vote of the Synod against the former minute.

The *Second Book of Discipline* put the whole subject of Church order and discipline in the clearest possible light. Spiritual authority, intrusted by God through Christ to his gathered Church, and having its ground in the word of God, is to be executed by those to whom the government of the Church is, by a lawful calling, committed. This authority is divided into *potestas ordinis* and *potestas jurisdictionis*, the *several* and the

---

<sup>1</sup>*Idem*, p. 150.

*joint* powers of which I have had occasion to make such frequent mention, both of which are exercised by men only in the way of a ministry under, and a service for, Christ the Lord. (*See Ch. i. throughout.*) The second chapter treats at large of the powers of the spiritual commonwealth as they are divided into “doctrine, discipline, and distribution,” and committed to “the ministers or preachers, elders or governors, and deacons or distributors,” all of whom are “called by a general word, ministers of the Kirk;” and the distinction between ordinary and extraordinary offices is pointed out, and “the four ordinary functions or offices in the Kirk” are set down as “the office of the pastor, minister, or bishop, the doctor, *the presbyter or elder*, and the deacon.” The third chapter treats of the mode of admitting persons who bear ecclesiastical functions to their office; from which, having before cited such passages as show the necessity of calling and ordination, and what they are, it need be only repeated here, as involving the immediate point at issue, that “the ceremonies of ordination are fasting, earnest prayer, and *imposition of the hands of the eldership*.” The only question, then, is to ascertain who this “*eldership*” is, and here there is no room for mistake, since the seventh Chapter treats expressly “of Elderships, Assemblies, and Discipline.” “Elderships and Assemblies are commonly constituted of pastors, doctors, and such as we commonly call elders.” (Sec. 1.) “*Assemblies* are of four sorts; . . . they are of particular kirks, one or more, or of a province, or of a whole nation, or of all and divers nations professing one Jesus Christ.” (Sec. 2.) In Sec. 14 it is said that by “the elders of the particular congregations, we mean not that every particular parish-kirk can or may have their own particular *elderships*, especially in landword; but we think three, four, more or fewer, particular kirks may have one *eldership* common to them all, to judge their ecclesiastical causes.” The power of *election* of all who bear ecclesiastical charges within the bounds of particular elderships, and also their *deposition*, belongs to them, constituted of many pastors and elders as just expressed. (Sec. 21 and 22.) “Provincial assemblies we call lawful conventions of the pastors, doctors, *and other elders* of a province, &c.” (Sec. 28); and

they also have “power to depose office bearers of that province, &c.,” (Sec. 28,) and all other powers of the particular elderships. (Sec. 29.) The General Assembly is the convention of all the kirks of the realm, and seems to have the amplest powers belonging to them all. (Sec. 30-34.) Now, of the doctor it is said, that it does not belong to his office “to preach to the people, to minister the sacraments, and to celebrate marriages,” but that “*being an elder*, as is said, he should assist the pastor in the government of the kirk, and concur with the elders his brethren, in all assemblies.” (Ch. v., Sec. 5 and 6.) The pastors are said to be called “presbyters or seniors, for the gravity in manners which they ought to have in taking care of their spiritual government.” (Ch. iv., Sec. 7.) And of elders it is said, “Their *principal office* is to hold assemblies with the pastors and doctors, who are also of their number.” (Ch. vi., last Section.) There is no direct statement in the instrument as to *which* eldership it especially appertains to ordain all persons who bear ecclesiastical functions; perhaps it might by its terms appertain to every Church assembly lawfully called and constituted. But the evident burden of the whole places this power in the hands of the *particular eldership*. But let that be as it may; seeing that elders, *with* pastors and doctors, constitute them all; seeing that it is the principal duty of the elder to hold assemblies, in which both pastors and doctors unite, not because they are pastors or doctors, but because they also are elders; seeing that imposition of hands is by *the eldership*; seeing that the ordination of pastors, doctors, elders, and deacons, is put on the same general ground; seeing there is no intimation of an ordination in any other manner; and seeing that elders—seniors—are emphatically presbyters; it does seem to me to be the very height of absurdity and an absolute contempt of common sense, for any one to contend that according to the principles and the very terms of this instrument, ruling elders are not permitted to impose hands in the ordination of ministers of the word.

I proceed to the standards of the Westminster Assembly—the most noble monument of the seventeenth century. That I may avoid the imminent danger of expatiating upon a subject so pre-

cious and so glorious as that furnished by the labors of this immortal body, I will confine myself strictly to the point at issue. At least three of its formularies throw light upon it. These are its Directory for Ordination, Directory for Church Government, and Confession of Faith; which, according to Hetherington,<sup>1</sup> were presented to the English Parliament, the first on the 20th April, 1644, the second about the middle of November, 1644, and the third on the 3d of December, 1646,—a sequence which it is of some consequence to observe. The citations I shall make from these three instruments are from the copies contained in Duncan’s Collections, edition of 1771. In the first of the three instruments, it is declared that, “every minister of the word is to be ordained by imposition of hands and prayer, with fasting, by those preaching presbyters to whom it doth belong.” (Duncan, p. 176.) It is added that he ought, when ordained, to be assigned to some particular church or other ministerial charge, and that he ought to be examined and approved by those who ordain him. (P. 177.) This, if it is to be taken without further examination of the sentiments of the body, is in the last statement exactly in accordance with our system; in the second principle, it is utterly contrary to our whole practice; and in the first, and as gentlemen on the other side suppose conclusive, definition, it requires us to go much further than has yet been contended for; for not only imposition of hands, but ordination itself is explicitly declared to belong to “preaching presbyters.” Is that, sir, the doctrine of our Church? If not, let us beware. As yet they only quote this Directory to prove that imposition of hands belongs to “preaching elders;” how long will it be before they quote it to prove—what it plainly asserts—that ordination also belongs to them? As we proceed we find this definition, “The power of *ordering* the *whole work* of ordination is in the *whole* Presbytery;” and a few paragraphs afterwards it is repeated that “the preaching presbyters . . . are those to whom the imposition of hands doth appertain.” (P. 177.) The business of the *Presbytery* is only to *order the work* of ordination, and in this *the whole* Presbytery must act; but as above defined and

---

<sup>1</sup>Hist. Westmin. Assem., pp. 152, 209, 244.

here again, the *preaching presbyters* must *ordain*. I demand again, sir, is this our system? The two heads of *Doctrine* and *Power*, under which the foregoing statements occur, are then thrown together, and under the 11th and 12th Sections of this united head we have these two important propositions: “In *extraordinary cases something extraordinary may be done.*” “. . . *There is at this time . . . an extraordinary occasion for a way of ordination for the present supply of ministers.*” (P. 179.) True enough, sir; but it sets the whole matter on a new foundation. Are we in a state of civil war? Have we no church courts in America, as there was not one in England when this Directory was drawn up? Do our fifteen hundred ministers and two thousand churches furnish no *present supply* of persons to constitute a single Presbytery? If not, there is indeed “*something extraordinary*” and we may perhaps lawfully do the extraordinary things allowed by our last Assembly. Next comes the practical detail, which is minute, and in most respects admirable.” The Presbytery shall come to the place, or *at least* three or four ministers of the word shall be sent thither from the Presbytery, &c.” (P. 181.) “The Presbytery, or the ministers sent from them *for ordination*, shall solemnly set him apart . . . by laying their hands on him.” (P. 182.) “In the *present exigencies, when we cannot have any Presbytery formed up to their whole power and work;*” thus it concludes, adding a mournful description of the times, and therefore recommends that “some godly ministers in or about the city of London be designed by *public authority*” to ordain ministers. (P. 184.) What public authority? The Long Parliament, of course, for that time, and all other civil authorities in all other places, when the like necessities justify it. Is this our system, sir? But, passing this by, is it not obvious that we have in these extracts four several modes of ordination, namely, 1. By ministers spontaneously met; 2. By Presbytery not fully formed; 3. By committee of ministers sent from Presbytery; 4. By a permanent committee of ministers appointed by the state? And is it not equally manifest that the whole Directory contemplates the extraordinary posture of affairs then actually existing around them, to meet which the Parliament



asked the advice of the Assembly, and to provide for which, in the best manner they could under the circumstances, they responded in this Directory? During the seven months which elapsed between the sending up of this Directory for Ordination, to the Parliament, and the giving in of the Directory for Church Government, the subjects most fully discussed in the Synod were the officers and the assemblies of the Church, and the whole ground covered by the Independent and the Erastian Controversy was thoroughly examined. In the Directory for Government, therefore, we have the more matured decisions of the body; their advice for a permanent and not for an extraordinary Church state; and in it we have every principle I could desire in the maintenance of my present argument. We have the Supreme Headship of the Lord Jesus clearly asserted; the *jus divinum* of Church government distinctly held forth; that government in the hands of assemblies, and those assemblies composed of officers, all instituted by Christ; those officers declared to be teaching and ruling elders; the classical assembly, which is our Presbytery, defined to consist “of ministers of the word and such other public officers as are agreeable to and warranted by the word of God to be church governors,” (Duncan, p. 173,) and many congregations defined to be under this “*Presbyterial government*” (p. 174). Here, sir, is everything. The power of ordination cannot possibly appertain except to the power of jurisdiction or that of order; it must be a joint or it must be a several power. If the Westminster Assembly held in its matured judgment, with all the Reformed Churches of the world, that this power is where the regimen of the Church is—in bishops, if the regimen is in them according to the Prelatists; in the brotherhood, if the regimen is in them according to the Independents; in pastors, if the regimen is in them according to Calvin; in the presbyters of each congregation, if the regimen is in them, according to Owen; in assemblies, if the regimen is in them, according to the general doctrine of Presbyterianism;—then by defining doubly that elders are the governors of the Church, and that they form *jure divino* a part of the governing assemblies, they decide, *ex vi termini*, that they must unite in ordinations. But if they held with the Papists, that

VOL. XXXIII., NO: 3—9.

ordination appertains to the power of order, and is a sacrament in the proper sense, then having adopted the absurdity, which upon this hypothesis it obviously is, that a Presbytery could ordain at all, which it could no more do than it could preach or baptize as a Presbytery, still the elder must, upon the hypothesis, have power to ordain; for he is defined to be *by order* entitled *jure divino* to membership in the body to which *by order* ordination appertains. That is, he is *in ordine* of the presbyters; he is of their *ordo*; he can aid *ordinare*, that is, in putting another person into the *order* of presbyters. So that these principles and definitions cannot stand without, upon every conceivable hypothesis, drawing after them one of two consequences, namely, that an elder is no elder, which is absurd, or that, when a member of the ordaining body he can impose hands in all ordinations. At the end of more than two years and a half from the completion of the Directory for Ordination, the Assembly finished its noble Confession of Faith. In the sixth Section of its first Chapter it declares that the word of God is our complete rule of belief, and thus sends us at once to it for our Church Order, and stamps with its reprobation the outcry about the practice of the Church. Or, if it supposed, contrary to its decisions, that the points now discussed are only matters common to human actions and societies, in that case it bids us go to the light of nature, Christian prudence, and the general rules of the word, neither of which, I believe, sir, will carry us very far in the theory that ordination is more or less than an act of solemn ecclesiastical authority, by which the Church, through her ordinary tribunals, confesses, attests, and records a calling which is not of her, but of God. In the third Section of Chapter xxv., it declares that the *ministry*—all the official servants of Christ in the Church—as well as the oracles and ordinances of God, were given by Christ to the catholic visible Church, a glorious truth. The Church has servants; but on earth she has no masters, no fathers, no head. The officers are appointed of Christ; the men qualified to fill them are not begotten from father to son, as was the Aaronic priesthood; nor fitted by a corporate descent, as contended for by Prelatists; nor magically and indelibly stamped by means

of incantations, after the dreams of Rome; but they are chosen, anointed, and sent of God, and the spouse of the Lamb, when she discerns the evidence of their heavenly mission, seals it by her willing and joyful attestation. Strange work would it be, indeed, if three deserters of the ministry could discern Christ's work more clearly, and attest it more faithfully, and seal it more precious to the Church, than the whole multitude of our ruling elders put together. In Sec. 1 and 2 of Chapter xxx., the doctrine laid down is that the divinely ordered government of the Church in the hands of divinely instituted Church officers, has been invested with the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and its power to open the kingdom to penitent sinners is defined to be "by the ministry of the gospel and by absolution from censures." Now, sir, will you tell me if ruling elders are disqualified from even assisting at the ordination of ministers, how is it possible for them to open the kingdom by sending forth a ministry of the gospel? And thus their power with these keys, in the way of mercy, is simply to relieve backsliders from censures; but to go beyond that is *ultra vires*. Why, sir, are elders church officers, forming any part of the Church government? Then they are of those who send ministers; and then if any part of the vocation or mission of any part of the ministry is imposition of hands, they must impose hands, or they must lay down the keys of the kingdom of heaven. And here, sir, though other portions of this Confession are equally clear to my purpose, I am content to rest the argument as to these standards. The conclusion is as affecting as it is obvious: let the elder surrender his office, or let him vindicate its sacred rights and duties. If his office is of man, he has no warrant to be here; if it is of God, let him beware how he permits it to be shorn and dishonored in his hands. I speak, sir, as one who ought to know the heart both of the ruling and the teaching elder, for I have served, however unworthily, in each class. I think I speak—I feel—with profound impartiality when I say there is no danger in our day of the ruling elders engrossing the peculiar functions of the teaching elders, but that there is an imminent hazard of the opposite result. Alas! sir, when you shall have settled it as the law of

our Church that jurisdiction in general is complete without ruling elders, and the right of ordination in particular is irrespective of them, there will remain little else to settle in order to divest them of all real authority in the Assemblies of the Church.<sup>1</sup>

The effect of the decisions at Westminster upon the previously existing standards of the Kirk of Scotland, which is the next point to be considered, was much less than is commonly supposed. It is well known that “unity and uniformity in religion amongst the Kirks of Christ in the three kingdoms” of England, Scotland, and Ireland, “was propounded as a main article of the Large Treaty,” and was “afterward, with greater strength and maturity, revived in the Solemn League and Covenant,” by which all the parties stood “straitly obliged to endeavor the nearest uniformity in one form of church government, directory of worship, confession of faith, and form of catechising.” The Scottish Assembly of 1645, in its Act of February 3, for establishing the Westminster Directory for the Public Worship of God—from which Act I have made the preceding quotations—distinctly asserts that the obtaining of this unity and uniformity was, “in point of conscience, the chief motive and end of our adventuring upon manifold and great hazards for quenching the devouring flame of the present unnatural and bloody war in England, though to the weakening of this kingdom, within itself, and the advantage of the enemy which hath invaded it, accounting nothing too dear to us, so that this our joy be fulfilled.”<sup>2</sup> In point of fact, the uniformity so ardently desired was never attained, however great may have been the sacrifices and even changes which

---

<sup>1</sup>They who desire to go behind the record and examine the process by which the Assembly at Westminster arrived at the conclusions contained in their authorised standards, will find ample materials in the XIII. Vol. of Lightfoot’s Works, the II. Volume of Baillie’s Letters, the III. Vol. of Neal’s History of the Puritans, Hetherington’s Hist. of the West. Assem., &c., &c. Upon mature examination of the whole case, I feel no difficulty in saying, that I think I shall be able to maintain the ground here presented, by the fullest examination of all such collateral proofs, whenever the discussion takes that shape.

<sup>2</sup>Printed Acts of the Church of Scotland, p. 257.

Scotland was willing to make in its pursuit; and until it should be attained, all the Acts of the Scottish Assembly had only a provisional force, dependent upon that event, and not one of them repealed any existing standard of the Kirk. In the very Act cited above, it is provided that even in regard to this Directory for Worship, which was fully set up by law in England, the Books of Discipline, and even the Acts of Assembly, should receive no prejudice in such particulars as were not otherwise ordered in the Directory; and in regard to two points touching the Lord's Supper—namely, coming to the table or not, and the distribution of the elements by the ministers or by the communicants amongst themselves—the doctrine of the Directory is denied. In the Act of Assembly of August 27, 1647, approving the Confession of Faith,<sup>1</sup> the doctrine of the Confession is denied in one important particular, and its silence in another is noted with protestation. Both these points throw light on the question now under discussion. In Ch. xxxi., Article 2, of the Confession, a power is conceded to the civil magistrate to call Synods, and to “ministers of Christ, of themselves, by virtue of their office,” to hold them; but the Scottish Assembly says, expressly, these doctrines are true “only of Kirks not settled or constituted in point of government,” and that “neither of these ought to be done in Kirks constituted and settled,” for in them the magistrate may consult the regular church courts, which are free to assemble and constitute “of ministers and ruling elders meeting upon delegation from their churches.” The same principle manifestly controls every sort of church court, which, by this comprehensive and well considered *caveat*, can neither meet nor act, and, of course, can not ordain, except they be composed of ministers and elders, and meet by delegation from their churches. It is worthy of all consideration that the doctrine of this part of the Westminster Confession, explained away by the Church of Scotland, was totally rejected by our Church, and the whole article containing it omitted, as will be seen on comparing the two Confessions. The other point called in question in the Adopting Act of the Scottish Church relates to the supposed want of sufficient explicitness in

---

<sup>1</sup>See the Act, pp. 351-3, of printed Acts of the Church of Scotland.

the Confession on the subjects “Of Ecclesiastical Officers and Assemblies,” which, adds the Act, ‘shall be no prejudice to the truth of Christ in these particulars, to be expressed fully in the Directory for Government.’ This Act, I have before said, was adopted in August, 1647; but on the 10th of February, 1645, two years and a half before, an Act was passed, “approving the propositions concerning Kirk government and ordination of ministers,”<sup>1</sup>—the latter of which had been laid before the Parliament of England in April, and the former in November, 1644, as I have already shown. This Act of 1645 has also its caveats. First, it denies the doctrine taught by the Westminster Synod, that doctors or teachers have the power of administering the sacraments; secondly, “as also of the distinct rights and interests of *Presbyteries and people in the calling of ministers*,” it protests that its present approval “shall be no ways prejudicial to further discussion and examination;” and thirdly, the whole result is to depend on the fact that this Westminster Directory, both for Government and Ordination, “shall be ratified, without any substantial alteration, by an ordinance of the Honorable Houses of the Parliament of England.” This event never happened, according to the terms of this Act; and the Scottish Kirk was so far from considering its work ended by this committal, that we find the Assemblies of 1646, 1647, 1648, and 1649, successively occupied with earnest endeavors to perfect that part of the covenanted uniformity which related to church government; and in the last named year, after the Westminster Assembly had finally dispersed, a separate “Directory for Election of Ministers” was adopted.<sup>2</sup> By this Scottish Directory of 1649, the whole superintendence, and work of trying, placing, admitting, and ordaining ministers, is plainly and expressly laid upon *the Presbytery*—the Presbytery of the Scottish standards; and not a word is said of the extraordinary methods, allowable because of the extraordinary times, held forth in the Westminster Directory for Ordination. None here, sir, can be ignorant of the calamities which, for so long a period, commencing about the time to which this examination has

---

<sup>1</sup>See it in the printed Acts, pp. 269-70.

<sup>2</sup>See it in the printed Acts, pp. 469-70.

brought us, overwhelmed the Church of Scotland. The events which followed the execution of Charles I., and the rise of Cromwell to supreme power; the sad disorders attendant upon the controversy between the Protestors and the Resolutioners, the Covenanters and the Malignants; the long intervals during which the higher judicatories of the Church were not permitted to assemble;<sup>1</sup> the frightful persecution under Charles II.; the woful condition of the Church under the Revolution Settlement under William and Mary, and the corrupting influence of the Acts of comprehension;<sup>2</sup> the subjugation of the Church to the civil government during the reign of Queen Anne, and the long and fatal supremacy of the Moderate party;<sup>3</sup> these sad events placed the Church of Scotland, from 1650 down to 1833, a period of 183 years, in a position which renders her written testimony valueless, compared with her early and glorious acts, and gives to all arguments drawn from her practice, during her subjugated, her suffering, and her corrupted periods, an air of bitter irony or deliberate reproach. The illustrious men who, in 1843, have stood for the ancient and sacred liberties of the Scottish Church, are worthy of our sympathy, admiration, and love; but even they see but dimly many truths which have been familiar to our Church for a century and a half, and have, if I may say it with becoming modesty, more need, by far, to learn of her, than she of them, many things touching questions like those it has been my duty to submit to this Synod.

We are now brought to the last link in the chain of this protracted deduction. During the latter part of seventeenth century and the first years of the eighteenth, the Presbyterian emigrants to this continent began to gather themselves into those societies

---

<sup>1</sup> The Assembly of 1690 was the first regular and legal one that had assembled for about forty years. Hetherington's *History Church of Scotland*, p. 554.

<sup>2</sup> For a clear account of the state of the Kirk at the period of the Revolution of 1688, and the influence of the settlement then, see Hetherington's *History of the Church of Scotland*. pp. 544 and 5.55-60.

<sup>3</sup> For the general character of Moderatism, and its influence upon the Kirk and the eldership, see Hetherington's *History Church of Scotland*, pp. 703-4 and 669-70.

which formed the nucleus of our present wide-spread organisation. We have the Minutes of our first Presbytery as far back as the year 1706. Upon a careful examination of the volume of Records published by our Board of Publication, which, as you know, sir, contains the proceedings of this Presbytery up to 1717, and from that time onward to 1788 the proceedings of our first Synod up to the organisation of the General Assembly, I find repeated declarations of the faith of the Church. To mention no others, I may refer to the years 1729, 1736, 1741, 1745, 1751, 1758, 1786, and 1788,<sup>1</sup> as having been signalised by very formal declarations in this regard, made under various circumstances of great importance and solemnity. On all these occasions the Westminster standards are referred to as containing, substantially, the faith of the Church both as to doctrine and order; but they are always so spoken of as to show that it was these standards as connected with and controlled by the standards and acts of the Church of Scotland, to which allusion was had; and, generally, so as to be taken rather substantially than rigidly as the standards of the American Presbyterian Church. Though approved by the Church of Scotland, the **Westminster** standards did not supersede in that Church her own more ancient platforms of faith, order, and discipline, which were made the basis of her most formal acts and of her legal settlement as a national Church, once and again, long after the Westminster Assembly had been dissolved and the Presbyterian Church of England had been subverted. These are important facts, not vital to my present argument, but needful to be borne in mind in order to a correct understanding of the whole subject. Our early Presbyterian ministers and population were chiefly from Ireland and Scotland; they came bearing with them the standards of the Scottish Church, and they came, so far as they were Scotch, from the bosom of that Church, virtually disorganised under Cromwell, persecuted almost to extermination by Charles II., corrupted by the revolution settlement, or torpid under the sway of Moderatism; and they brought with them an ecclesiastical practice modified by all these adverse circumstances. Their condition here was, moreover, in all respects extraordinary,

---

<sup>1</sup>See these Records, pp. 93, 125, 155, 158, 202, 232, 286, 519, 546.



and they were obliged to do as they could, rather than as they would have preferred; a fact recognised by themselves in every movement during the first ninety years of their existence as an organised Church, up to the formation of our present constitution. I do not, therefore, wonder to see in their records a gradual development of the principles which now distinguish our system; a continual strengthening of the great truths of Presbyterianism; a steady movement from a condition of incipient life and irregular action upwards to a firm, settled, and well ordered strength, such as the careful student cannot fail to discern as he traces them from 1706 to 1788. From the beginning we find no recognition of that principle of the Westminster Directory for Ordination, that the civil power could designate a standing body of ministers to ordain; none of that which teaches that a Presbytery imperfectly constituted may ordain; none of that which asserts that it appertains especially to the ministers of the word to impose hands; none of that which declares that ministers casually met may regularly ordain. The first ordination recorded is one by the Presbytery itself; but the mode afterwards practised seems to have been by a committee of ministers appointed by the Presbytery, or by the Synod. If either branch of this fact should be thought important, it may diminish the significance of the exclusion of ruling elders from these ordaining committees to know that it does not appear that any ruling elder was ever appointed on any sort of committee during those eleven years whose records we have, although it is certain they sat in every Presbytery, except the first, and highly probable they sat in it;<sup>1</sup> and the influence of ordination by committee upon the present question is altogether with me; for the constitution which abolished the practice can hardly be supposed to confirm the principle on which that practice rested. As soon as we find the Synod called to consider questions connected with ordination, we find the distinctive principles of the Scotch, and not those attributed to the West

---

<sup>1</sup>The commencement of the old MS. record is lost; the part in which the presence of elders is recorded in all the other meetings being torn off; and as they were present always afterwards, the presumption is violent for their presence here.

VOL. XXXIII., NO. 3.—10.

minster, standards, every where taken for granted: ordination by church courts, and by committees appointed by them, concurrent powers of Presbyteries and Synods in ordinations; but nothing at all about assemblies of ministers by virtue of their office ordaining other ministers; nothing of a permanent body of ministers distinct from a church court or independent of it, appointed either by civil or ecclesiastical authority for this purpose. As we advance, we find the present features of our system more clearly developed; the claims of the Presbytery as the proper ordaining body distinctly asserted, and even vindicated as exclusive, and virtually conceded by the Synod.<sup>1</sup> At length we come to the termination of what may be called the forming state of our Church. In the year 1785, a large committee, at the head of which was the great John Witherspoon, and amongst whose members were the leading men who had for years before represented what some may call extreme Presbyterian opinions, was appointed to “take into consideration the Constitution of the Church of Scotland and other Protestant Churches, and agreeably to the general principles of Presbyterian government, compile a system of general rules for the government of the Synod, and the several Presbyteries under their inspection, and the people in their communion.” During the years 1786, 1787, and 1788, this subject occupied the earnest attention of the Church, the Presbyteries, and the Synod; and at length resulted in the formation of our present Form of Government and Discipline. Synchronously, the subjects of the Confession of Faith, the Catechisms, the Directory for Public Worship, the division of the Synod, and the erection of the General Assembly, were happily concluded, and the Church placed in the condition which

---

<sup>1</sup>See a remarkable instance on pp. 443-5 of Printed Records, year 1773, growing out of the question of the reception of foreign ministers. Many ministers, with Francis Allison at their head, call “the duties of ordaining and admitting ministers” “essential rights” of Presbytery; others, with Matthew Wilson at their head, say these powers belong *only* to Presbytery; others, headed by Dr. Rodgers, simply dissent from the obnoxious act of Synod; and that body, in its answer, concedes the general principles set forth upon this point by the dissenting members.

she has occupied till the present time.<sup>1</sup> Here, sir, is our system—a system compiled by men of great learning and abilities—men known in this and other countries for their devotion to the Presbyterianism of the sixteenth and seventeenth, rather than that of the eighteenth century; a system founded upon the great and general principles of Presbyterian government, with all the light which a thorough, survey of the state and laws of all Protestant Churches could elicit, and especially modelled with a reverent consideration of “the Constitution of the Church of Scotland;” a system pondered during years of careful study and observation, and embodying the ripe fruits of the experience of almost a century of successful effort in new and extraordinary circumstances, by a Church wonderfully raised up of God in this new world; and at last adopted with a common consent, as a rule revealed of God, illustrated and confirmed by an immense experience, and commended by all the lights of reason and knowledge. Sir, it is a glorious system—worthy to be better known by those who profess it; to be more carefully observed by those who administer it.

So far as the provisions of this Form of Government bear upon the present question, I have already largely expounded them. It only remains to compare its actual definitions with those of the various platforms which I have passed in review, and especially with those of the Westminster Assembly and the Church of Scotland. To do this in detail would require much time, and seems to me to be needless. Every form of expression found in the Forms of Government adopted by other Churches, which can be tortured into a rejection of ruling elders from the work of ordination, is excluded from ours. Every principle which looks in that direction is omitted. Every form of words needful to invest them with this authority is inserted, and that not unfrequently in the place of words more or less doubtful in other forms, or where other forms are silent. Every principle upon which this divine right reposes is set forth with perfect distinctness. If it belongs to the great and general principles of Presbyterian government that ordination is in the hands of

---

<sup>1</sup> See printed Records, pp. 512-547.

Church rulers, then ordination is here put into their hands; for upon those principles this Constitution was avowedly formed. If it was ever taught by other Protestant Churches; if it was ever held by the Church of Scotland; if it belongs to the Church order divinely revealed; if it can be vindicated from the general rules of the word; then upon all and upon each of these conditions it must be found here, for so did our fathers compile this instrument and set up this government. Yes, sir, it is here. And the more thoroughly we comprehend the whole subject, the more largely we contemplate the principles which govern the case, the more minutely we examine the opinions and the actions of past generations, the more manifest it is that in the nature of the case it cannot be otherwise. Why, sir, upon the very arguments most pressed on the other side, and upon those principles considered the most forcible against my view of the subject, it seems to me that it is only necessary to state the matter plainly in order to end the dispute. Gentlemen say it was the habit of our Church to ordain by a committee of ministers only for nearly a century. Grant it; and the answer is, that half a century ago this practice, which never had law to support it, was prohibited. Now, sir, how far does such a state of the case go to prove that ministers only ought to ordain? Gentlemen contend that by the definitions of the Westminster Synod it belongs to teaching elders to impose hands in the ordination of other teaching elders, and that the standards of that Synod are essentially ours. Grant it, and grant even that these definitions were meant to exclude ruling elders, to apply to a permanent and not to an extraordinary Church state, and that the standards containing them were strictly adopted, as they stood, by our early Church—neither of which propositions can be proved; and the answer is, that more than fifty years ago our Church, upon mature examination, adopted a Constitution, which declares that the imposition of hands in such ordinations is in, *not* the teaching elders, but the Presbytery; and that the Presbytery is composed, *not* of teaching elders, but of teaching and ruling elders. And how far, sir, does this state of the case go towards excluding ruling elders from the exercise of the disputed power? Why, sir, look

at this logic. When ordination was by *committee*, ministers only ordained; now the law requires ordination to be by *Presbytery* composed of ministers *and elders*; *therefore, ministers only* must still ordain! Again: The *Westminster Directory* says the *preaching presbyters* must impose hands in ordination; *our Constitution* says *the Presbytery* must do it, and says, moreover, the Presbytery is composed of ministers *and ruling elders*; *therefore, the ruling elders must not impose hands!* Truly, sir, we are fallen upon disjointed times, when a learned ministry is carried away by fallacies like these.

Moderator, there are two things which I have sought in vain throughout the entire history of Christianity. I can find no pure Prelatical Church; I can find no Presbyterian Church that continued pure without a pure and honored eldership. Sir, these are portentous truths; or if I err in regard to them, I will bow in thankful docility to any one who will condescend to set me right, and thus remove a frightful danger from the Church of Christ. Prelacy, sir! Look at the bloody track of the Church of Rome; look at the centuries of deadness and superstition which have blasted the Greek and the Oriental Churches; look at the whole history of Anglican and Anglo-American Episcopacy, its worldliness, its formality, its hereditary subjugation to an unconverted ministry, rendered more glaring by a very small remnant of God's dear children who have been always found in her to save the whole mass from putrefaction; look, too, at every Presbyterian Church whose principles led it to disparage the eldership, whose ministers, catching the spirit of hierarchy, subjugated or dishonored these representatives of God's people, or even whose misfortunes deprived them of this greatest of all safeguards thrown like an impregnable bulwark about the Church in her state militant. Sir, I can show you a Church kept pure, almost without ministers of the word, for years—nay, for generations; look at the history of the Covenanters—since 1660. But can you show me any Church of ours, or any Church at all, which continued long pure without a pure and honored eldership? All the glory and all the spiritual power of Calvin and of Geneva have ended in an Arian Church. Cen-

turies of persecution found the Church of France, at their close a Socinian Church. In the Scottish Church the whole reign of Moderatism has been attended with a subjugated and an unconverted eldership. In England, without an eldership to breast the storm of the restoration, the Puritan churches perished like Jonah's gourd. In our own land, the period of strength and of the power of sound doctrine in the churches of New England was the period of their elderships; and since they passed away, every absurd and idle thing has found a resting place in the churches of the Pilgrims. In our very bosom, for six and thirty years, the churches of the *plan of union*, the churches of committee-men, were the nursery of every disorder; and when the time of reform came, by the good hand of our God over us, it was by the power of the elders, most emphatically, that it was accomplished; and it was the region without a pure and an honored eldership that, having fallen from the truth, fell away from the Church. Oh! sir, let us not deceive ourselves in regard to a matter so vital to us all. If jurisdiction in general be complete without an eldership, that eldership is superfluous; if the power of ordination in particular is too sacred for the eldership, then the eldership is dishonored before God and in the sight of his Church. And think you that a superfluous and a dishonored eldership can stand before God, or continue faithful to his Church? And we, sir—what more do we preaching elders need, after having usurped exclusive jurisdiction and exclusive ordination? What more has the Church to surrender to us?—what other barrier to erect against us? “Limitations, cautions, triennial parliaments, may do much,” said that great, calm, wise, far-sighted man, Alexander Henderson;<sup>1</sup> “but we know that fear of perjury, infamy, excommunication, and the power of a national Assembly, which was in Scotland as terrible to a Bishop as a Parliament, could not keep our men from rising to be Prelates.” And what, sir, shall “keep *our men* from rising to be Prelates,” after engrossing the essential powers of Prelates, imbibing the fundamental doctrine of Prelates, and overthrowing the firmest bulwark against Prelates? Alas! sir, was not the primitive Church once free? Were not

---

<sup>1</sup> Hetherington's Hist. Westmin. Assem., p. 305, Appendix i.

the men who corrupted and betrayed her men of like passions with ourselves? Are not these priests of Oxford and of Rome as good by nature as the best of us? Why, then, shall we be blind to the terrible lessons of the past, insensible to the sublime uniformity with which all moral causes operate, deaf to the humiliating proofs of our own weakness and depravity, which cry aloud to us on every hand? Bear with me, sir, if my emotion carries me too far. It is my deep conviction that I should distrust myself which so emboldens me to implore my brethren not to remove this great safeguard of the Church which our Redeemer has purchased with his most precious blood.

Moderator, my duty is done; a duty which the circumstances around me have made one of the most painful and embarrassing of my whole life; a duty which, in faithfulness to my own character and position, to the interests of the Church, and to the cause of truth, it seemed to me I could not omit. It remains for this court to decide whether, according to our covenanted principles, Presbyterian ordination is a charm or an act of government; whether it appertains to the Presbytery or to the ministers of the word. As your judgment shall be in regard to these propositions, so must your vote be upon this minute, which, in the fear of God, I submit to you.

According to the explicit faith of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, the Lord Jesus has given to his visible Church "the ministry, oracles, and ordinances of God, for the gathering and perfecting of the saints in this life, to the end of the world" (Confess. Faith, Ch. xxv., Sec. 3); this "ministry" consists, in a settled Church state, of "bishop or pastors, the representatives of the people, usually styled ruling elders, and deacons," who are "the ordinary and perpetual officers in the Church" (Form of Gov., Ch. iii., Sec. 2); the two first named classes of officers, to wit, pastors and ruling elders, constitute the "congregational, classical, and synodical assemblies," by which, in accordance with the Scriptures, the Church is to be governed (Form of Gov., Ch. viii., Sec. 1; Ch. ix., Sec. 1; Ch. x., Sec. 2; Ch. xi., Sec. 1; Ch. xii., Sec. 2); to this government, in the hands of the aforesaid officers, the Lord, as King and Head of his Church has committed the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Confession of Faith, Ch. xxx., Sec. 1 and 2), to be used expressly, amongst other ends, "for the gathering and perfecting of the saints," as before set forth. To this end, the ministry of the word, a part of that general ministry given by the Lord Jesus to the visible

Church, is to be perpetually kept up therein, “to the end of the world;” and it particularly appertaineth in our Church to “classical assemblies,” called Presbyteries, and not to other sorts of assemblies, and especially not to one or more ministers of the word individually considered or casually met together, “to ordain, install, remove, and judge ministers” of the word (Form of Gov., Ch. x., Sec 8); which classical assembly, or Presbytery, is rightly constituted of ministers and ruling elders, and cannot legally act except when at least “three ministers and as many elders as may be present belonging to the Presbytery” constitute “a quorum competent to proceed to business” (Form. of Gov., Ch. x., Sec. 2 and 7); and which said Presbytery, in the ordination of ministers of the word, is to lay its hands—that is, the hands of all its members, or of any part thereof on behalf and as the act of the whole, and so of the Presbytery itself, that is, of the same Presbytery to whom the power of ordination appertains—upon the candidate in his ordination (Form of Gov., Ch. xv., Sec. 14).

But inasmuch as the General Assembly of 1843 did, on the 25th day of May last, decide by yeas and nays 138 to 9, *non liquet* 1. and excused from voting 2, to adopt an Overture No. 14, declaring that the Constitution of our Church does not authorise ruling elders to impose hands in the ordination of ministers (printed Minutes, p. 183); now this Synod, believing the said decision to be wholly erroneous in itself, and most injurious in its practical tendency, as well as inconsistent with the fundamental principles of our Church Government, does hereby, and in virtue of its inherent powers (Form of Gov., Ch. xi., Sec. 4), propose to the General Assembly, in the way of Overture, the repeal of said Overture No. 14, adopted by the Assembly of 1843, and the adoption of a minute stating—

1. That the whole work of the ordination of ministers of the word belongs regularly and properly to a Presbytery composed of preaching and ruling elders.

2. That the Presbytery which should impose hands is the same as that which performs all the rest of the work of ordination.